ATONING FOR KILLING: THE PRACTICE OF PENANCE AND THE PERCEPTION OF BLOODSHED AMONG THE EARLY MEDIEVAL IRISH, FIFTH TO NINTH CENTURY.

BURKE, DAVID

ATONING FOR KILLING:

THE PRACTICE OF PENANCE AND THE PERCEPTION OF BLOODSHED AMONG THE EARLY MEDIEVAL IRISH, FIFTH TO NINTH CENTURY.

DAVID BURKE

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History, Durham University

2014

Abstract

From the introduction of Christianity into Ireland in the fifth century to the arrival of the Vikings in the ninth, the attitudes of the Irish Church towards bloodshed and violence changed considerably. The moral code of pacifism and non-violence, especially towards other Christians, advocated by the Christian Churches came into direct confrontation with the violent necessities of secular life when the Roman Empire adopted the new faith as its state religion. Further difficulties arose when the Roman Empire gave way to Germanic kingdoms, and when the Christian faith began to make its way out to lands unconquered by Rome, such as Ireland; challenged by cultures in which honour and violence were part of the social fabric, and by the idea that victory in battle demonstrated divine favour, the Church had to both integrate itself into these new lands and try to draw them closer to the Christian ideal. Penance for the sins committed in life could be undertaken, but it was an arduous and humiliating process, such that many did not seek redemption until near death, an attitude which did not rest easy with the Church. The monastic system of penance, fixed in term and confessed in private, became available to the laity in the British Isles, a seismic shift which would allow a layman a new avenue to atone for sins of bloodshed, from murder to killing in war. It has, however, been questioned as to whether such penance was widely available to the laity as a whole or only to a specific group from among them. This thesis will explore how this changing attitude towards violence within the Irish Church demonstrates that this new form of penitential practice was indeed available to the whole laity through examining the development in nuance concerning the various sins of bloodshed across not only the Irish Penitentials, but hagiography, canon law, secular law, narratives, and other texts.

Contents

Abbreviations

Can. Ad.	*Canones Adamnani*
AClon.	Annals of Clonmacnoise
AI	Annals of Inisfallen
AT	Annals of Tigernach
AU	Annals of Ulster
BB	*Bethu Brigte*
Bieler, *Penitentials*	Bieler, L., *The Irish Penitentials*
Bieler, *Patrician Texts*	Bieler, L., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*
Byrne, *Kings*	Byrne, F. J., *Irish Kings and High-Kings*
Dauid	*Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis*
de Clercq, *Les canons*	de Clercq, C., *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VI^{e}-VII^{e} siècles)* (2 vols.)
Etchingham, *Church Organisation*	Etchingham, C., *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D.650 to 1000*
HE	Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*
Hefele, *Councils*	Hefele, K. J., *A History of the Christian Councils: from the original documents* (5 vols.)
Hibernensis	*Collectio canonum Hibernensis*
Kelly, *Law*	Kelly, F., *A Guide to Early Irish Law*
Kenney, *Sources*	Kenney, J. F., *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide*

MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
AA	*Auctores Antiquissimi*
SRG	*Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*
Muirchú	Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*
OI Pen.	Old Irish Penitential
OxDNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (60 vols.)
Paen. Amb.	*Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*
Paen. Bi.	*Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum*
Paen. Columb.	*Paenitentiale S. Columbani*
Paen. Cumm.	*Paenitentiale Cummeani*
Pen. Vinn.	*Penitentialis Vinniani*
Praefatio Gildae	*Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia*
Sinodus Aq.	*Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae*
Sinodus Luci	*Sinodus Luci Victorie*
Synodus Pat.	*Synodus I S. Patricii*
Tírechán	Tírechán, *Collectanea*
U	'The Penitential of Theodore'
VB I / *VPB*	*Vita I S. Brigidae*; trans. by Connolly, S., '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*'
VB II / *VB Cog.*	Cogitosus, *Vita II S. Brigitae*; trans. by Connolly, S., and Picard, J.-M., 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit"'
VC	Adomnán, *Vita S. Columbae*

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr Clare Stancliffe and Prof. Richard Gameson, for their invaluable support, guidance, patience, and encouragement over the last few years.

I also wish to thank the Department of History, the Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (IMEMS), the Medieval and Early Modern Student Association (MEMSA), and Ustinov College at Durham University for offering a social and academic environment in which to discuss my work and learn from other postgraduates and academics, and for providing funding towards my attendance of conferences and specialist schools.

I owe great debt of gratitude to my parents, Marion and Paschal, and my brother, Matthew, for their unwavering faith and endless encouragement. My thanks also go to too many friends to name, but especially to Aversa Sheldon and Anna Dow who read and commented on parts of this thesis.

Introduction

When Wenilo, archbishop of Sens, provided Louis the German with military support during his invasion of the kingdom of his half-brother, Charles the Bald, in 858, he was explicitly providing material ecclesiastical assistance for the inevitable violence.[1] Though the Archbishop would not have personally taken part in the bloodshed, he must have assured the forces under his remit of divine support, and that, though they would be involved in the killing of fellow countrymen, any penance for that sin would be relatively brief. When in 1066 William launched his invasion of Anglo-Saxon England, he had secured papal assent by agreeing to the demand that his men would undertake penance for every life they took, intentionally or not.[2] Though separated by centuries, these two conflicts are indicative of an important and far-reaching new line of Christian thought: killing could be condoned by the Church, and it must have been be atoned for, and rather quickly at that. Indeed, not only could killing be forgiven, but the killing of fellow Christians could be absolved. The killing of heathens had been broadly supported by the Church for generations, evidenced by the prayers of British monks in support of their fellow Britons against the pagan Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Chester,[3] Charlemagne's marshalling spiritual support though mass acts of religious celebrations, including the performance of penitential deeds, for his military campaigns against the Avars and the Saxons,[4] and the armed pilgrimage to liberate Jerusalem from Islam which resulted in the recasting of killing as an act of penance itself, known to later generations as the First Crusade. To kill a Christian was another matter entirely. The understanding of the nature of this sin, and its accompanying spiritual punishment, would

[1] Janet L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (Harlow, 1992), p. 188.
[2] The very first canon of the penitential demands laid down on the victors of Hastings stated 'Qui in magno prelio scit hominem se occidisse, secundum numerum hominum, pro unoquoque anno peniteat'; *De penitentia in bello homines occidentium*, in D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. N. L. Brooke (eds.), *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church I: A.D. 871-1204* (Oxford, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 583-584: §1. The same canon offers penances for those who attacked an enemy without killing him ('Pro unoquoque quem percussit si nescit eum inde mortuum fuisse... quadraginta diebus peniteat'), and those who did not know if they had killed ('Si autem numerum percussorum vel occisorum ignorant ad arbitrium episcopi sui quoad vivit uno die in ebdomada peniteat...'), with the following canon, §2, providing for those who had wished, but failed, to kill ('Qui autem neminem percusserit, si percutere voluerit, triduo peniteat'). This text alone illustrates the tremendous leap that had taken place from the early Church to the dawn of the eleventh century, from a blanket condemnation of all forms of killing as one crime to a codified series of penances which presented even bloody warriors a path to forgiveness and recognised varying degrees of severity of the sin itself based on deed and intent.
[3] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, in Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), II 2.
[4] David S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300-1215* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 33-37.

change radically over the course of the early middle ages as the various Churches of the Christian West grappled with this complicated issue. The Irish Church was no different but, while it did face the same problems and difficulties as its neighbours, it arrived at its own solutions to how to atone for killing.

Ireland is an island, but this was no disadvantage in the early medieval period, when seas and rivers were the primary means of long-distance transport. The Irish Church may have been insular, but it was not isolated. Indeed, there is direct evidence of contact between the Irish Church and Rome in the early seventh century on matters concerning the Easter Controversy,[5] and of links between Ireland, Gaul, and the West Saxons.[6] This may offer the (likely) possibility that there was sustained contact between the Irish Church and the Continent, and especially Frankish Gaul, through various conduits which could have conveyed the most recent synodal decrees and new theological discourses. Ireland even became an attractive destination for Anglo-Saxon and Frankish ecclesiastics in the seventh century who wished to enhance their scholarship.[7] Such freedom of movement would have created numerous ecclesiastical contacts which would, in turn, encourage the exchange of ideas, and perhaps even texts, keeping the Irish Church up to date with its neighbours.[8]

The lands of the Irish were territories of competing kings and dynasties, where young nobles joined violent gangs and sought employ as mercenaries, where legal and illegal forms of bloodshed were explicitly defined in a detailed and elaborate secular system of law, securing every free man's right to defend his family, property, and honour by the strength of arms. With their own ancient traditions, language, laws, and culture, the Irish were slowly

[5] Cummian's Letter describes how a delegation was dispatched by the Synod of Mag Léne to Rome to investigate the accepted calculation of Easter; see Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, in Máire Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (eds. and trans.), *Cummian's Letter* De controversia Paschali *and the* De ratione conputandi (Toronto, 1988), pp. 90-94. Bede notes that Pope Honorius (625-638) and pope-elect John IV (640-642) sent letters to the Irish Church in *HE*, II 19.

[6] Agilbert, a Gallic bishop, spent a substantial amount of time in Ireland studying the Scriptures before becoming bishop of the West Saxons, and was later bishop of Paris, according to Bede; *HE*, III 7. It does not seem implausible that Agilbert is representative of a wider network of connections between Ireland and Gaul. Indeed, such connections may have led to Willibrord's, a monk of Ripon, decision to study at Rath Melsigi in 678; see Michael Richter, 'The English link in Hiberno-Frankish relations in the seventh century', in Jean-Michel Picard (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France, AD 600-850* (Dublin, 1991), p. 114.

[7] Richter compiled a list of known foreigners in Ireland and its associated territories during the seventh century, among which were Anglo-Saxon monasteries such as Mag Éo, the exiled Dagobert, the Gaulish bishop Arculf, and Ecgberct who was credited with converting Iona to the orthodox calculation of Easter; see Michael Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 137-156.

[8] For a discussion on the 'intimacy and frequency of contacts' between Ireland and Britain from the seventh to the ninth centuries, see Kathleen Hughes, 'Evidence for contacts between the churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age', in Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 49-67.

introduced to a new religion, one which offered a new way of interpreting the world and man's place in it: Christianity. Ireland had never belonged to the Roman Empire, an organisation which left an indelible mark on the structures of the Church, but contact was inescapable. Christianity had been part of the fabric of the Empire for over a century before organised missions were dispatched to Ireland, and later this relatively new faith strove to find its place in the emerging Germanic successor kingdoms. Ostensibly a religion of peace, a central tenet of which was forgiveness and redemption, it was a faith that was often at odds with the practicalities of administering an empire or kingdom. To be baptised into this religion was to have one's sins washed away, to agree to live life according the precepts of Christ as interpreted by his episcopal heirs and holy men. To become Christian was to join a faith which was at once older and newer than the Empire, drenched in ancient Jewish traditions while also inventing its own, but it was one that failed to offer a coherent vision, one united voice behind its aims and its means to achieve them. Diverse traditions grew in each region where it gained a foothold, melding with, and moulding, older customs, such that a bishop in Gaul, though agreeing broadly on the fundamental nature of the Messiah, would find many of the pastoral practices of a Cappadocian counterpart unfamiliar. Both would have agreed, however, that sin was at large in the world, and that it had to be atoned for.

There developed the notion in the Christian Church that the sins accumulated since baptism could be expiated through the humiliation of public confession and rigorous penance. This was an opportunity for the remission of sin that could not be repeated, a second baptism consigning the penitent to a life of near-monastic, chaste simplicity in the belief that this would ease their suffering in the afterlife. From this attempt to offer solace and comfort to the sinner arose a situation whereby a layman, from king to peasant, might not confess until near death to avoid social shame or the discipline of penance. The alternative was to die before any action could take place, leaving the families and the Church in fear for the soul of the departed. The burden of sin weighed heavily on the medieval mind, and to expire without your misdeeds confessed and forgiven was of dire concern. Such matters had become infinitely more complicated when Christianity became a 'state'-backed faith, and it found itself in the awkward situation of having to support the often violent actions of secular authorities. In parallel to the Continental Churches, this troubled relationship between the mission of every good Christian, as exemplified by Christ, to live a life of peace and the often brutal reality of secular life was also played out among the religious institutions of the British Isles; such difficulties led to innovation.

In an early investigation of the Insular Penitentials, Watkins refers to the private penitential system as a 'momentous revolution',[9] a radical divergence from the traditions of the Latin Church. A long debate followed concerning the originality of the penitential system and its creation being a result of 'Celtic' influences.[10] Gathering together the various Insular penitential texts which lie at the core of this debate, Bieler agreed to the likelihood that the Insular penitential system had its origins in Wales, before being adopted and developed later in Ireland, while at the same time being influenced by Cassian.[11] In his review of the debate, Frantzen disagrees with Oakley's conclusions, stating that, while Caesarius and Cassian were undoubtedly regarded as great authorities, they did not inspire or influence the Penitentials in any respect other that in their general principles.[12] Frantzen appears to regard McNeill and Oakley as the two extremes of the dispute, believing that McNeill was correct in arguing Irish innovation, but disagreeing on what that innovation was: he argues that the Penitentials were one solution to the problem which faced all Christian Churches, the inherent conflict between the high standards demanded by faith and the often grim reality of lay society.[13] He argues that the model of Irish monasticism was inspired by the ascetic ideals of Egyptian monks, transmitted initially via the Loire region or Iberia, and, later, Continental traditions were conveyed home by the Irish missionaries, especially Columbanus, such that the Church purposefully sought to connect native ideas with monastic traditions.[14] The sins described in the Penitentials pertain primarily to young men, the social category most likely to come into contact with a monastery for either education or enrolment, suggesting that the handbooks were written not by monks imagining sins but from genuine experience: the literature of penance grew from the practice.[15] This is, as I hope to demonstrate, a crucial point: the Penitentials were not the product of monks imagining what sins the laity would commit and inventing hypothetical solutions to such problems, but rather the result of direct pastoral

[9] Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance: Vol. II: The Western Church from AD 450 to AD 1215* (London, 1920), p. 537.
[10] The Insularity of the Penitentials was supported by, for example, John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Penitentials and Their Influence on Continental Christianity* (Paris, 1923), pp. 82-89; John F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (New York, 1929; reprinted with revision by Ludwig Bieler, 1966), pp. 238-242. Oakley argued that the Penitentials were a product of Continental, particularly Gallic, thought; for example, Thomas P. Oakley, 'Commutations and Redemptions of Penance in the Penitentials', in *The Catholic Historical Review* 18, No.3 (Oct., 1932), p. 343 and p. 348; and *idem*, 'Cultural Affiliations of Ireland in the Early Penitentials', *Speculum* 8, No. 4 (Oct., 1933), pp. 489-500; and *idem*, 'The Origins of Irish Penitential Discipline', *The Catholic Historical Review* 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1933), pp. 320-332.
[11] Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 3-5.
[12] Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Jersey, 1983), p. 25.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 26, and pp. 32-33.
[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

interaction, a negotiation between the needs of the laity for absolution and the needs of the clergy to ensure that true atonement had been accomplished, both parties being wary of the purgatorial fires (or worse) in the afterlife. Underling this point, Frantzen states that the 'Penitentials did not exist until they were needed; when the practice of private penance had become sufficiently widespread, booklets in which penitential decisions had recorded became desirable', arguing that the Irish Penitentials were indeed an innovation, and though they drew on ecclesiastical texts and, possibly, Irish law codes, they were not adaptations.[16] They did not develop from existing texts, but arose by necessity, and only when the theological framework which supported them was widespread.

A decade after Frantzen's investigation of the Anglo-Saxon literature concerning penance, Connolly offered an analysis of the Irish Penitentials which follows McNeill in the notion that the system was deeply influenced by Irish traditions, specifically what he refers to as 'druidic culture', and that other elements which may have had an effect on monasticism in Ireland may have their roots in ancient Celtic or Indo-European culture, comparing brehons and *anamchairde* ('soul-friends') to brahmans.[17] Connolly believes that the 'Celtic mind was already favourably disposed here towards the application of this type of medical imagery',[18] but notes that the writings of Cassian must have found their way to Ireland directly as the 'Principle of Contraries' is not found in the earlier Welsh material,[19] and that the works of Cummian and Finnian show the clear influence of Cassian.[20] Connolly believes that the extremes of Irish asceticism were born of a lack of violent martyrdom, which led to the inception of Irish 'green' martyrdom.[21] Arguing that the *amnchara*, 'soul-friend', was a pagan Irish idea,[22] Connolly assumes the Irish were not aware of the traditional forms of

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
[17] Hugh Connolly, *The Irish Penitentials and Their Significance for the Sacrament of Penance Today* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 6-8, p. 16, and p. 20.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 32, and p. 206, n. 20.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 32 and p. 34. The *Ambrosianum* was the model for Cummian's Penitential, a fact Connolly was unaware of, perhaps as it was, at the time of publication of his work, only recently 'rediscovered' and located to an Insular context, points which will be discussed below in Chapter 2; on the date and location of the text, see Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher* (Sigmaringen, 1993), p. 86. Indeed it would appear that Körntgen's contribution would remain relatively unnoticed for much of the debates surrounding the nature of Insular penance, except by Rob Meens; see Rob Meens, 'The historiography of early medieval penance', in Abigail Firey (ed.), *A New History of Penance* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 82-83. The editions of Finnian and Cummian consulted in the present work are found in: *Penitentialis Vinniani*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 74-95, and *Paenitentiale Cummeani*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 108-135.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 12. The nature of this 'green' martyrdom (and the appropriate translation of the term as 'blue' martyrdom) is explore in detail by Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick, and David Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 40-42.
[22] Connolly, *The Irish Penitentials and Their Significance*, p. 14.

penance in the Continental Church, and so had to invent their own, thus creating private penance and reconciliation, and making the priest, not the bishop, the minister of forgiveness.[23] These Hiberno-centric attitudes appear to have gained little ground, perhaps because it is clear that the Irish Church, established by a bishop sent by Rome and converted by the efforts of British missionaries, was in frequent contact with Britain and the Continent, making it unlikely that Irish clergymen were unaware of the wider traditions of the Christian Church (these points will be explored throughout the thesis).

Dividing the 'Celtic' Penitentials into two categories, pre- and post-Cummian,[24] Charles-Edwards argues that the former works are directed within the Church, focusing individually on the clergy, monks, or laity, while the latter, based on Cassian's divisions of sins, deal with the Church as a whole, and only occasionally focus on a specific group; under this interpretation, the 'particular' was replaced by the 'comprehensive'.[25] In the same volume as the above article appeared, Bullough wrote that Columbanus introduced the Irish practice of private and frequent confession, and equally private and repeatable penance, to the Continent.[26]

With a consensus on the origins and manner of development of the penitential texts seemingly established, Etchingham began to question the practicality of administering pastoral care to the laity, an aspect of which included penance. He has argued that pastoral care was limited to the *manaig* (singular, *manach*), the lay tenants of the Church, such that penance was the sole domain of the Christian elite, such that the vast majority of Irish society remained unredeemed and unredeemable.[27] The question of the availability of pastoral care (and consequently of confession and penance) is, in essence, one of exclusivity or inclusivity, of perfective (permanent) or purgative (fixed-term) penance. Etchingham concludes that, in respect to the laity, penance was only undertaken by what he terms 'paramonastics', a lay elite who lived under a continuous 'regime of austerity', such that the penitential system divided the Christian elect from broader society, and set a limit upon who was permitted to

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
[24] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 218.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Donald Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus', in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), p.12. Oakley's arguments concerning evidence of private penance being advocated by Caesarius and Julianus Pomerius would seem to counter this assertion; see Oakley, 'The Origins of Irish Penitential Discipline', p. 323. The penitential text associated with Columbanus is *Paenitentiale S. Columbani*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 96-107.
[27] Colmán Etchingham, 'The Early Irish Church: Some Observance on Pastoral Care and Dues', *Éiru* 42 (1991), p. 118; *idem*, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Naas, 1999), pp. 317-318.

receive pastoral care.[28] Indeed the very nature of whom the laity consisted has been challenged by Sharpe.[29] He has argued that the laity itself is not what we might first assume it to be, and that the term *laicus* (and its Old Irish equivalent, *láech*) may in fact be indicative of the survival of paganism into the eighth century.[30] These two theories challenge the very nature of Christianity in early medieval Ireland, and have striking implications for the practice of penance and the Church's attitude towards violence.

In contrast to this, O'Loughlin seems to imply that penance was not as limited as Etchingham would have us believe.[31] Providing a brief outline of the use and regulation of public penance,[32] O'Loughlin argues that private penance was made possible by Cassian's suggestions that penance was not punishment but medicine, focusing on the individual and their spiritual illness, and that penance could be repeated.[33] Underlining the stimuli of Cassian and other fifth-century writers, O'Loughlin notes the influence of Old-Irish law and native culture, and the apparent originality of the Irish writers.[34] Equally, Charles-Edwards has raised certain difficulties with Etchingham's argument, pointing out that the status of *manach* could apply to a far wider cohort of the laity, from the population of an entire kingdom to whole lineages who placed family-members in key ecclesiastical positions, not simply the lay tenants of the Church.[35]

Given these two divergent hypotheses, it is essential that we return to the texts themselves, examining them in detail, and, by using the lens of bloodshed to focus on a controversial debate within the Christian Church at the time, glean some insight into the development and thought behind the Irish Penitentials. We may find, as a result of this investigation, a curbing of the extreme exclusivity of Etchingham's 'paramonastic' model, such that, while there were 'paramonastics' attached to religious establishments, confession and penance was not refused to the general laity. It will be illustrated, hopefully, that the Irish Church developed a nuanced approach towards bloodshed and penance, expressed through

[28] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 317. This theory appears to have been accepted by Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 48-50, and Follett, W., *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 52.
[29] Richard Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', *Ériu*, 30 (1979), pp. 75-92.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 90
[31] Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Penitentials and pastoral care', in G. R. Evans (ed.), *A History of Pastoral Care* (London, 2000), p. 101.
[32] *Ibid*., pp. 94-95.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 96.
[34] O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology; Humanity, World, and God in Early Irish Writings* (London, 2000), pp. 53-56 and p. 61.
[35] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000; reprinted, 2004), pp.118-119.

hagiographical works, canon law, and penitential regulation in the desire to expand the possibility of salvation to all quarters, coupled with the necessity of providing support for secular authorities. The Irish Penitentials, rather than providing an example of the Church offering a compelling argument to guide the faithful, reveal the consequence of the debate concerning penance and bloodshed. By examining in detail the various texts and historical figures mentioned (among others), and by placing them firmly within their own context, we may hope to arrive at a broader and nuanced understanding of the practice of penance, and the perception of bloodshed, among the early medieval Irish. Having arrived at a broad consensus concerning the origins and nature of penance among the Irish, in spite of Etchingham's hypothesis and the arguments against him, the problem remains: who suffered penance? Was atonement available to all Christians administered to by the Irish Church, or limited to a specific cohort of the laity?

The sin of killing, as I hope to demonstrate, offers a unique and insightful perspective on these questions, and possibly a means to answer them. The developing nuances in the understanding of how to atone for bloodshed are, I will argue, indicative of the Irish Church negotiating and interacting with lay society, justifying and entrenching its role among a people and culture with often radically differing values to the Christian message. This was not a one-sided negotiation: the Church had to accommodate the needs of its patrons and flock, and it too had to make sacrifices, sacrifices which would seem to run contrary to the core values of the faith. I hope to establish that the Irish Church, from a very early stage, did make penance available to the laity, and it refined its understanding of the sin of killing to make the penitential process more appealing to the Christian masses.

To that end, in Chapter 1, I will begin by exploring the precedents for penitential thought on the sin of killing, focusing on early Continental European synodal decrees and the evidence of early British Christian texts, and the possible penitential thought of two particular men active in the earliest days of the Irish Church, one who was sent by Rome and one who believed that his mandate was granted by God. These various elements will serve to illustrate both the origins and the novelty of Penitentials themselves, a codified system of sins and their penances which arose in the late sixth century in Ireland, though indebted to the British Church, which allowed for the propagation of fixed-term, repeatable penance from monks to laymen. The four earliest examples of this new genre – the Penitentials of Finnian,

Columbanus, and Cummian, and the anonymous *Ambrosianum*[36] – will be explored in Chapter 2, both in terms of the establishing and affirming penitential traditions and creating new and astute grades of sins to atone for.

The veritable explosion of hagiographical material in seventh-century Ireland offers a useful perspective into contemporary thought. Saints became the mouthpieces for their associated establishments, and their *Vitae* may hold clues to the attitudes of certain religious establishments towards violence and bloodshed, though the scope of the present investigation is limited to texts associated with three specific examples: Brigit, Columba, and Patrick. While such a small sample may seem restrictive, it must be remembered that the cults of these saints, and the institutions which controlled them, were hugely influential, and the attitudes concerning penance and bloodshed depicted in their associated texts may be indicative of widely held beliefs, or, indeed, beliefs that their promoters wished to be widely held. Several of these texts reveal that certain foundations could tolerate bloodshed under certain circumstances, but only if it was undertaken under the appropriate authority, such that the Irish Church can be found to be both condemning and condoning violence. The Brigitine and Patrician traditions will be examined in Chapter 3. While Chapter 4 will discuss the hagiography of Columba, it will do so in the context of other writings associated with Adomnán of Iona (d. 704), that is, his law-code and a series of canons attributed to him. This slight change in tack is a result of the rare survival of such disparate texts which can be associated with one author; in Adomnán we have both a legalist and a hagiographer, and his works, when taken together, offer a unique perspective on the attitude of Iona towards the sin of killing, especially in times of conflict.

Contemporary to Adomnán's abbacy was the career of Theodore of Tarsus at Canterbury. An anonymous scribe compiled the teachings of the Archbishop, an element of which was a commentary on Cummian's work, into single collection which became known as the 'Penitential of Theodore'.[37] This work would introduce a radical penitential term for killing in conflict, creating, in a sense, a second phase in terms of the penitential understanding of bloodshed, and would serve as the basis, along with Cummian, for the Bigotian Penitential and its very close relative the Old-Irish Penitential (both of the eighth

[36] *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*, Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 258-270. The complicated relationship between these texts is depicted in Diagram 1 and Tables 1-2 below, p. 234 and pp. 236-237.

[37] U, Paul Willem Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929), pp. 285-334.

century).[38] Theodore's influence can also be seen in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, an authoritative compilation of Church teachings on a variety of subjects, including the sin of killing. These texts will be explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 will examine the impact of Máel Ruain (d. 792), his monastery at Tallaght, and aspects of the nascent ascetic reform movement he is credited with founding: the *céli Dé*. This organisation may have been an influential factor in the career of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (d. 847), an interesting figure who offers an example of a man who may have been trained in a monastery before becoming king of Caisel, a king who waged numerous wars against his neighbours and challenged the claimed supremacy of the Uí Néill, and who was supported in his bloody efforts by the *céli Dé*, a somewhat paradoxical situation to say the least.

In the opening line of a chapter concerning penance in his book *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000*, Etchingham noted that 'pastoral care and dues theoretically pertained to the populace at large'.[39] This simple statement encapsulates an enduring aspect of debate concerning the Irish Penitentials and the practice of penance in general among the Irish. Who was the target of this spiritual restitution, the expected congregation upon whom the Penitentials were applied? Was penance available to the whole of society, as has been argued by O'Loughlin and Charles-Edwards, or, as in Etchingham's view, limited to an exclusive lay minority as a result of the fact that the (often violent) nature of secular life put most of the laity beyond the Pale, the penitential demand for the permanent laying down of arms in atonement for the sin of killing being incongruous with a society in which a blood-feud had legal standing and where warfare and raiding between the leading kingdoms of the Irish were a persistent feature of the landscape.[40] Chapter 7 will investigate this question alongside the nature of specific categories of killers, from professional warriors to apparent pagan ritualistic murderers, which challenge not only the notion that penance was available to the laity at large, but who was counted among the laity.

In examining such a wide variety of documents, I hope to overcome the difficulties and issues inherent in each genre. The Penitentials, as prescriptive texts, offer little evidence as to the efficacy of their adoption by the laity; indeed, it could be argued that they suggest

[38] *Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 198-239, and 'The Old-Irish Penitential', D. A. Binchy (ed. and trans.), in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 258-277.
[39] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 290.
[40] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988, reprinted 2005), p. 127, and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 570-571.

little in the way of penance even being made available to the wider Christian community. Hagiography, though often fantastic, contains intriguing descriptions of penance and who might undertake it, and though it is fundamentally propaganda, it is propaganda couched in realistic scenarios and ecclesiastical aspirations, such that when laymen suffering penance are encountered they may serve as both a symbol of successful expiation of sin and of the hope that others would seek the solace of medicine for the soul. Other, non-hagiographic narrative texts also contain episodes concerning penance, often of a practical nature, of a holyman encountering a specific penitential conundrum, which may be (near-)factual accounts of such matters. Canons and laws ascribed to specific churchmen or synods offer an insight into ecclesiastical attitudes as they demonstrate a precise response to a particular issue which was agreed upon (and presumably enforced) by the participant institutions and signatories. Language too plays a role: texts in Latin would be limited in their audience, but documents in Old Irish would be widely understood, features which lend themselves to our understanding of who was the target of certain material. There is, of course, one over-riding bias which cannot be escaped: the majority of the documents examined in this thesis are products of the Church or owe their survival to it, and so may depict a particular vision of the early medieval world which is not entirely accurate and deeply influenced by the religious mindset of the authors. That said, the competitive nature of the great Irish ecclesiastical institutions, the wide temporal and geographical scope, and the apparent practicality of many of these texts may serve to limit such bias, or indeed identify it more clearly when it does occur, allowing the modern scholar to carefully wade through the often enigmatic shoals of early medieval Irish history.

Issues of intent, culpability, and agency were emerging and increasingly important factors which bore important influence on the ever more nuanced penitential thought of the Irish Church. As I hope to illustrate, the Irish Church appears to have moved from a position whereby killing, though forgivable, was not a deed which could be condoned by ecclesiastics and was understood only very broadly to one of fine distinction where not only did a killer's relationship to the victim matter, but also his state of mind, his desires, and his duties as a client to a lord. It is essential that we return to the texts themselves, examining them in detail, and, by using the lens of bloodshed to focus on a complex debate within the Christian Church at the time, glean some insight into the development of penitential thought among the Irish. By tracing the developing and changing understanding of bloodshed across the centuries and across the lands influenced by the Irish, from Iona to Caisel, from Clonfert to Canterbury, I

hope to illustrate how this sin in particular allows us to clear a path through the fog to see how nature of penance was refined and who submitted to its arduous demands. Unlike the sins of fornication or apostasy, killing is a sin which can be traced not only in penitential texts and synodal decrees but in annals and secular law-codes; it is a public sin which, unlike fornication and apostasy, came to be condoned under very specific situations, thus describing, perhaps more than any other sin, how the Church came to terms with the secular world and was changed by it. I hope to demonstrate that the Irish Church developed a nuanced approach towards bloodshed and penance, expressed not only in penitential texts, but hagiographical works, canon law, secular law, and various other writings, in the desire to expand the possibility of salvation to all quarters, coupled with the necessity of securing the support of secular authorities. The development of Irish penitential thought and the Church's shifting attitudes towards bloodshed reveal the consequences of the negotiation between religious and secular authority over their roles and responsibilities towards one another, and, more pragmatically, the nature of their mutual dependence for security and divine mandate. As O'Loughlin has stated, 'the penitentials are the harbingers of all later theologies of penance in the west',[41] and so it is important not only to understand their development, but the context in which they evolved; this was not a linear process of improvement, but a complicated exchange and recasting of competing ideas expressed across a range of sources. This is a tale of great hopes and practical compromises, of anonymous writers and ecclesiastical heroes, of humble reed-gatherers and battle-ready kings; this is the story of how the penance of monks became the penance of all men, and of how warriors could kill and kill again, yet still be redeemed.

[41] O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, p. 66.

Chapter 1: Precursors and Influences

1.1 Continental Penitential Thought, c.300-c.600

By the time that the Papacy dispatched its first bishop to administer to the nascent Irish Church in 431,[42] Christianity had already suffered a long and difficult relationship with penance and bloodshed. With his toleration, promotion, and eventual conversion to the new faith, to which his biographers credited his vision and victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312,[43] Constantine made matters rather complicated for the various Christian Churches of his empire. The Christian God would thenceforth be invoked to protect soldiers before they entered battle, girding armies with the belief that they were fighting on behalf of the divine will, the military camp would serve as a home to religious practices, grafting the new faith on to old traditions, and elaborate prayers and ceremonies became a core element of military practice.[44] By making Christianity a state religion, Constantine and his successors moulded the Christian God into a God of war to bolster the morale of their forces, and to provide ultimate sanction for their imperial ambitions. Where the Roman state held a monopoly over bloodshed the successor kingdoms would struggle to enforce the same conformity of law. As the rule of Rome Empire fractured in the West, numerous competing realms were founded by violent warlords who established themselves as kings. While this new Germanic geography washed away much of the secular administration associated with the Empire, many aristocratic families invested the Church with their fortunes, both economically and politically. In terms of penance and bloodshed, little had changed: communities needed to be ministered to and secular authorities expected divine aid in their endeavours. The sin of bloodshed was of increasing concern to a faith which professed peace operating in the midst of endemically violent societies.

At the Spanish Synod of Elvira (305/6) it was decreed that a woman who struck her servant in anger, resulting in the latter's death within three days, was to undergo seven years

[42] A. D. 431: 'Ad Scotos in Christum credentes ordinatus a papa Caelestino Palladius primus episcopus mittitur', Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*, in Theodor Mommsen (ed.), *Chronica minora saec. IV, V, VI, VII*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: auctores antiquissimi* (Berlin, 1892), vol. ix, p. 473.
[43] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (trans.) (Oxford, 1999), Bk. 1, §28-32, pp. 80-82; and Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, J. L. Creed (ed. and trans.) (Oxford, 1984), §44, pp. 62-65.
[44] Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 8-14.

of penance if the violence of the act was intentional.[45] If it was not her objective to kill the servant, the penance was reduced to five years.[46] During her penitential term, the woman was to be denied communion, unless she fell into illness, in which case she was to be offered the sacrament.[47] It is interesting to note that the canon specifically refers to a domestic situation and to the *domina*,[48] the lady of the house, and is not concerned with the broader sin of homicide. It may have been understood that servants (or indeed slaves) were expected to be disciplined physically, and that this may result in excessive violence which may have resulted in death. In is also worth noting that the canon describes the circumstances of the act in terms of the *domina* flying into a jealous rage, *furore zeli accensa*, such that even though she may have intended to kill the servant, it was still a crime of passion.[49] This may be seen as an effort to separate this particular type of incident from cold-blooded and intentional murder, or perhaps even as a devaluing of the responsibility of women in terms of rationality. The synod also demanded that one who had killed by sorcery, *vero maleficio*, can never receive communion, even at the time of death, because they have fallen into idolatry.[50] The gravity of punishment of this sin is weighted towards its perceived pagan aspects and not the act of killing itself. It was also pronounced at Elvira that, under specific circumstances, one could be culpable for acts of violence that one did not personally perform: baptised Christians who maintained the office of *flamen* and officiated gladiatorial games were considered to be guilty of the sin of homicide, and were forever prevented from taking communion.[51] The implication here may not be one of association with, or culpability for, homicide, but participation in pagan rituals and practices deemed unsavoury by the Church. This synod was less concerned with sin of bloodshed in general, but was more focused on specific sets of (possibly rare) circumstances and the regulating of lay life.

Across the Mediterranean, less than a decade after Elvira, the council of Ancyra (314) appears to have confirmed the decisions of its Spanish counterpart, though in a somewhat garbled fashion: the unpremeditated murderer is allowed to return to communion after seven

[45] *The Synod of Elvira, 305/6*, in Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils: from the original documents*, William R. Clark (ed. and trans.) (Edinburgh, 1871-1896), 5 vols.; vol. 1, pp. 138-172, §5. On the dating and location of the synod, *idem*, pp. 131-138.
[46] The canon explicitly divides the penitential terms along the lines of will and accident: 'si voluntate, post septem annos, si casu, post quinquennii tempora, acta legitima poenitetnia, ad communionem placuit admitti'; *ibid*, §5.
[47] '...quod si intra tempora constituta fuerint infirmata, accipiat communionem'; *ibid*.
[48] The title of the canon is 'Si domina per zelum ancillam occiderit'; *ibid*.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Ibid*, §6.
[51] *Ibid*, §2. Concerning the term *flamen*, see Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 139-140.

or five years of penance.[52] Perhaps in an effort to clarify matters, wilful murderers were also discussed: they are to suffer permanent penance and could only receive communion near the end of their life.[53] Here we find the specificity of Elvira on unpremeditated killing broadened into a general precept, and balanced with a ruling on premeditated killing. This also illustrates that the Christian Church on both sides of the Mediterranean saw intent as a key factor in deciding the culpability of the offender.

A synod gathered at Neocaesarea (314-325) decreed that a man who had sinned in thought, but who had not enacted the deed did not have to undergo public penance.[54] While this was not in relation to the sin of bloodshed, it is indicative of an awareness of intent as separate from deed, a theme which will be picked up in the Irish Penitentials. These pre-Nicene councils demonstrate that the Christian Churches in both the East and West were not only communicating with one another, but that they actively borrowed penitential theories. If the bishops of Ancyra were not of like mind with their Spanish equals, they could have easily modified, or indeed ignored, the canons of Elvira concerning unpremeditated killing. These texts also illustrate the evolving recognition of the nuance between thought and deed, and between intentional and heat-of-the-moment action. It may even be the case that the decisions of these synods concerning the sin of bloodshed served as sources for the Irish Penitentials. Not unlike the Irish Penitentials, the focus of these canons was the individual Christian and their personal sins.

At the Synod of Nicaea, convoked by Constantine the Great in 325, it was agreed that those who had become Christian and surrendered their arms, only later to revert to military service, should they return to the Church and submit to penance, were to spend thirteen years

---

[52] *The Synod of Ancyra, 314*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 201-222: §23. For the dating of this text, see *idem*, pp. 199-200. The decree does not note that Elvira was the source of this ruling, but it would appear that the Spanish council was known to this synod as a preceding canon, §21, closely resembles *Elvira*, §63. In the same year as the council at Ancyra, a synod took place at Arles which decided 'De his qui arma projiciunt in pace, placuit abstineri eos a communione'; *The Synod of Arles, 314*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 184-197: §3. See also 'The Synod of Arles, 314', in Liam De Paor (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Dublin, 1993), p. 54. This is not in reference to laymen renouncing violence (something which the Church would have presumably encouraged) as one might first assume, but rather a pronouncement against gladiatorial games, an interpretation reinforced by the fact that the following canon, *Arles* §4, denounces charioteers. It is interesting to note that present at this synod were Liberius of Merida (Emerita) in Spain (who also attended the Synod of Elvira), Eborius of York, Restitutus of London, and Adelfius of Lincoln, which not only illustrates the 'international' nature of this synod (indeed, the synod included representatives from Sicily, Dalmatia, Italy, Gaul, Spain, and Africa), but also provides an avenue for the dissemination of the decrees of Elvira and Arles, and perhaps other synods, to Britain; for the attendants of Arles, see de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, p. 56, and for Elvira, see Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, p. 132.

[53] *The Synod of Ancyra*, §22.

[54] *Synod of Neocaesarea, 314-325*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol.1, pp. 223-230: §4. On the dating of the synod, see *idem*, pp. 222-223.

among the penitents; if these individuals showed true repentance and did good works, it was within the power of their bishop to treat them with leniency.[55] This again may not a general precept, but one with a specific aim: in the context of Constantine's rise to power, some Christians had gone to war on the side of his rival Licinius, a man who was branded a pagan, and so all who joined in his service were tainted.[56] Whether or not later generations grasped such historical considerations is unknown, but one can easily see how this canon offers a model for how a penitent soldier might be accepted back into the Church, and, at the very least, that it implied that the sins of the soldier could be forgiven.

Around this time, Basil the Great, in a series of letters to Amphilochius and others, outlined his attitudes towards penance and bloodshed. In his first of three letters to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium, Basil distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary killing,[57] deciding that the latter carries a term of eleven years' penance,[58] and that, crucially, killing in combat was not equated to murder, though warriors should abstain from communion for three years.[59] In another correspondence, this time to a soldier, Basil appears to be surprised, or rejoicing at the fact, that someone in the military can maintain a perfect love of God.[60] Taken with the former ruling, this would seem to imply that soldiering and a good Christian life were not mutually exclusive life choices in the mind of Basil. Killing in self defence still counted as killing,[61] which must exclude action in warfare, and refer to civilian violence. In his third letter to the bishop of Iconium, Basil appears to contradict his earlier ruling, stating that voluntary killers must suffer twenty years of penance, which is halved for involuntary killers, both being denied communion for the duration;[62] the involuntary killer serves one year less than Basil had previously stated.

[55] *Synod of Nicaea, 325*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 375-435: §12.
[56] Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 418-419. Eusebius paints the war between Constantine and Licinius as a war between madness and reason, paganism and Christianity; Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, H. J. Lawlor (ed.) and J. E. L. Oulton (trans.) (London, 1932), vol. 2, X, viii-ix, pp. 465-481.
[57] Basil of Caesarea, 'Letter 188', §8, in Agnes Clare Way (trans.), *Saint Basil: Letters* (Washington DC, 1951), vol. 2, pp. 4-24,. This letter was written in 374; see Way, *Saint Basil*, p. 4, n.1.
[58] Basil of Caesarea, 'Letter 188', §11.
[59] *Ibid*., §13.
[60] *Ibid*., 'Letter 106', in Way, *Saint Basil*, vol. 1, p. 231. This letter was written in 372; see Way, *Saint Basil*, p. 231, n. 1.
[61] *Ibid.*, 'Letter 199', §43, in Way, *Saint Basil*, vol. 2, pp. 47-62. This letter was written in 375; see Way, *Saint Basil*, p. 47, n. 1.
[62] *Ibid*., 'Letter 217', §§56-57 in Way, *Saint Basil*, vol. 2, pp. 105-117. This letter was also written in 375; see Way, *Saint Basil*, p. 105, n. 1.

In 386 a synod at Rome decided that no man who served in war after having been baptised could become a cleric,[63] a prohibition which was reaffirmed in 402.[64] This reiteration may indicate that the Church of Rome was having some difficulty in enforcing this decree. There is also evidence to suggest that this opinion was not universally accepted: at the first Synod of Toledo, in September 400, it was determined that those who serve in war may indeed become clerics, but could not advance to the diaconate.[65] Another aspect of this issue was examined at the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451: monks or clerics were banned from serving in war, and, if they did, they were to be anathematized unless they repented and returned to their vocation.[66] The 'Apostolic Canons' (of undetermined origin, but translated from Greek to Latin by Dionysius Exiguus in the early sixth century) forbade bishops, priests, and deacons from serving in the military.[67] The decrees of these various councils would appear to suggest that the wider Christian Church faced an enduring problem of not only those who had served in war entering the clergy, but the clergy itself serving in war. It would appear that the Church hierarchy, with the notable exception of Spain, was in agreement that the sins associated with warfare were sufficiently great so as to exclude one from being admitted to the clergy, yet it was possible for one who had already been ordained, and lapsed, to return to his position after the appropriate repentance.

In 461, a few decades after Palladius departed for Ireland, a council at Tours denounced those who returned to a secular life after having undertaken penance, comparing them to dogs returning to their vomit and who then become an example to others by their exclusion.[68] This position was reiterated at Vannes in 465.[69] A council at Orléans in 511 decreed that, in a similar fashion to Tours, a penitent who returned to a secular life was to be

[63] The decisions of this synod survive in a letter from Pope Siricius to the bishops of Africa, stating that the synod re-enacted older Church laws, such as the one noted above; see Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 2, pp. 386-387.
[64] *The Synod of Rome, 402*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 2, pp. 429-430: §4. This synod was held under the authority of Pope Innocent I, and sixteen of its canons survive as a response to queries by the bishops of Gaul; *idem*, pp. 428-429.
[65] *The First Synod of Toledo, September 400*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 2, pp. 419-421: §8.
[66] *Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, 451*, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 3, pp. 285-422: §7.
[67] 'The So-Called Apostolic Canons', in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 458-492: §83 (82). For a discussion of the dating of the text and its relationship to Dionysius, see *idem*, pp. 449-450.
[68] 'Si quis vero post poenitentiam, sicut canis ad vomitum suum, ita ad saeculares illecebras, derelict quam professus est poenitentia, fuerit reversus, a communione ecclesiae, vel a convivio fidelium extraneus habeatur, quo facilius & ipse compunctionem per hanc contusionem accipiat, & alii eius terreantur exemplo', *Concilium Turonicum I*, in J. P. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1759-78), 53 vols.; vol. 7, cols. 943-947: §8. The canons of this council were subscribed to by, among others, Mansuestus, *episcopus Britannorum*, which is, presumably, a reference to the Britons of Amorica, not Britain proper; in either case, the canons of the council would have been easily transmittable back to the British Isles.
[69] *Concilium Veneticum*, in Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum novaa et amplissima*, cols. 951-955: §3. For the dating of the text see de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, p. 66.

separated from other Catholics.[70] Six years later at Épaone this decree of Orléans was reaffirmed, though it was amended with the pronouncement that those who had fled could return to the Church, a reconciliatory flexibility perhaps drawn from the council held at Vannes.[71] Roughly twenty years later again at Orléans, a council of bishops ordered that anyone who had undertaken penance and then returned to a secular and martial life was to be punished as an excommunicate until his death.[72] The penitent layman, it seems clear, was expected to remain in a penitent state until death, and the fact that these councils deemed it necessary to emphasise this condition is indicative of a degree of lethargy among the laity to endure persistent penance, or perhaps of the Church's inability to enforce it. There also appears to have been some disagreement over whether or not a layman could return to his penance once he had abandoned it.

In tandem with this repeated assertion of the imposition of a permanent state of penance imposed on lay penitents, the Frankish Church also legislated for bloodshed. The council of Tours (noted above) stated that homicides could not receive communion until their sin had been washed away by penance,[73] and the synod of Vannes decreed that those who took a human life were to be denied communion until they had confessed and undergone penance for their sin.[74] The council at Épaone also explicitly stated its acceptance of the canons of Ancyra concerning the penance for homicide,[75] demanded a two year period of excommunication to expiate the crime of the killing of a slave,[76] and imposed a punishment of monastic confinement on a deacon or priest who committed a capital offence, denying them communion until near death.[77]A short time later, another council at Orléans appears to have wanted to underscore the gravity of voluntarily taking the life of an innocent, subtly distinguishing this act from involuntary homicide, or taking the life of one who was not

[70] *Concilium Aurelianense I, 511*, in C. de Clercq (ed. and trans.), *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VI^e^-VII^e^ siècles)* (Paris, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 70-91: §11.
[71] 'Si quis accepta professaque paenitentia boni inmemor ad saecularia relabatur , prorsus conmunicare non poterit , nisi professioni , quam inleceto praetor miserat, refurmetur', *Concilium Epaonense, 517,* in de Clercq, *Les canons*, vol. 1, pp. 96-125: §23. Compare to *Concilium Aurelianense I*, §11 and *Concilium Veneticum*, §3.
[72] *Concilium Aurelianense III, 538*, in de Clercq, *Les canons*, vol. 1, pp. 230-263: §28 (25).
[73] *Concilium Turonicum I*, §7.
[74] To be precise, homicides and false witnesses were to be barred from Church communion unless they had washed away their admitted crimes with satisfactory penance, 'nisi poeniteniae satisfaction criminal admissa diluerint'; see *Concilium Veneticum*, §1.
[75] *Concilium Epaonense*, §31.
[76] *Ibid.*, §34.
[77] *Ibid.*, §28.

innocent.[78] The council of Clichy (626-627) confirmed that those who had killed of their own free will could be returned to communion, but only once they had completed their penance.[79]

From these examples, it would appear that the fear of lay and clerical penitents lapsing back into a secular life or actively joining in bloodshed was an enduring issue that faced the Western Church in particular, which is perhaps why the council of Épaone required the sequestering of an offending cleric or monk to a monastery until the end of their days.[80] The demand for clergymen not to enter into armed conflict, and the limiting of their advancement within the Church if they did, does not preclude them from participating in such violence spiritually. It is interesting to note the nuance concerning the nature of the violent action (that is, wilful and non-wilful homicide) which entered the conversation by the early sixth century, perhaps through the influence of the decrees of Ancyra as transmitted by the council of Épaone, would become a key aspect of the sins of bloodshed in the Irish Penitentials, and would open the way for the further gradation of sins by intent.

It may have been the case that this laxity of the laity and the clergy in the undertaking of penance is what led certain Continental ecclesiastical figures to investigate alternative avenues of redemption by the fifth and sixth centuries. Acts such as fasting, prayer, and alms-giving were increasingly being accepted as penitential deeds which could offer some remission of minor sins, such that the sacrament of public penance was reserved for only the most serious offences, which is to say, homicide, adultery, and apostasy.[81] There may have been a growing sense that minor private, personal sins could be compensated for with repeatable penances, while the major sins which affected others still needed to be confessed and atoned for publicly. This trend towards providing repeatable acts of penance to the laity, coupled with the expansion of the private and repeatable monastic penitential practice to those outside the monastery, may have created a need to regulate and define what practices were required for a given sin, a process which reached its logical conclusion in penitential handbook first developed in sixth-century Ireland. The Continental synods did not discuss

[78] The canon in question appears to suggest that the criminal would only undergo penance if they were handed over to a priest by the leaders of the community or parents of the killed innocent, leaving one to wonder if these leaders or parents had the right to take the life of the killer in retribution, and, if so, would they had to undergo penance for taking the life of the killer; see *Concilium Aurelianense IV, 541*, in de Clercq, *Les canons*, vol. 1, pp. 266-295: §28. This decree may not, as Bachrach suggests, implicitly distinguish between killing an innocent and one who was not, but may rather have served to underscore the value of children in an era of high infant mortality, such that the killing of a minor was particularly heinous; see Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, p. 24.
[79] *Concilium Clippiacense, 626-627*, in de Clercq, *Les canons*, vol. 2, pp. 528-547: §11.
[80] *Concilium Epaonense*, §22.
[81] Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 27-28.

every sin from the minor to the major and assign it a penitential reparation, they focused on the more serious and pressing issues that concerned them. This may have offered bishops a great degree of latitude when it came to sins not covered by the synodal decrees, and based their decisions on precedent, tradition, and their own judgement. This vacuum of regulation may have also encouraged the creation of a codification of penances in a land where Christianity was still a relative newcomer.

1.2 The First Christian Mission to Ireland

It would appear that by the early fifth century there were sufficient numbers of Christians in Ireland to merit the oversight of a bishop; Pope Celestine dispatched a certain Palladius to fulfil this role in 431.[82] Who were these first Irish Christians? Traders, perhaps, who had established themselves along the Irish coast,[83] slaves captured in Irish raids on Roman Britain (of which there is one very famous example), or maybe even native converts to a faith which held, among other assets, the prestige of Rome. We know next to nothing of these earliest Irish Christians other than that they existed, and that the papacy may have feared that these Christians had fallen, or would fall, to the Pelagianism which had gripped Roman Britain.[84] It is, in fact, concerning that very issue that we meet first meet Palladius in the record of Prosper: while at Rome, the former appears to have been a key figure in the instigation of the mission of Germanus of Auxerre to Britain to root out the Pelagian heresy in 429.[85] Two years later we meet Palladius again, promoted to the grade of bishop and sent to Ireland. If the first bishop of the Irish can indeed be equated with Palladius son of Exuperantius, a

[82] See n. 42 above.
[83] Catherine Swift has identified three interesting 'fifth-century facts' concerning the earliest evidence for Christians in Ireland: Roman silver ingots found in Limerick stamped with a Judeo-Christian name and the *chi-rho* monogram, a number of Irish ogham stones commemorating men with Roman, plausibly Christian, names, and the discovery of an inscription in a fifth-century Roman graveyard bearing a dedication to an Irish Christian in Trier. For a detailed account of these points, see Catherine Swift, 'Patrick's conversion of Ireland to Christianity and the establishment of Armagh', in John R. Barlett and Stuart D. Kinsella (eds.), *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Ireland: lectures delivered in Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, 2001-2002*, pp. 27-32. When one considers the silver ingots, and the level of literacy, and perhaps wealth, required for the production of an ogham stone, it may be plausibly suggested that enterprising traders from the Roman Empire may have set up shop, so to speak, in Ireland, some of whom may have been Christian, and brought with them their household, which would have consisted of not only their family, but slaves, employees, and dependants.
[84] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 205.
[85] A.D. 429: 'Agricola Pelagianus, Severiani episcopi Pelagiani filius, ecclesias Britanniae dogmatis sui insinuatione corrumpit. sed ad insinuationem Palladii diaconi papa Caelestinus Germanum Autisidorensem episcopum vice sua mittit et deturbatis hereticis Britannos ad catholicam fidem dirigat', Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon*, p. 472.

member of the Romano-Gaulish aristocracy who studied law at Rome where he entered the religious life, abandoning his wealth, wife, and family, and who may even have fallen under the spell of Pelagius for a brief time,[86] we are presented with an individual who was, presumably, not only devout but well-educated and capable, and who held the confidence of the Pope. It is highly unlikely that Palladius, whoever he may have been, would have been sent out alone and without resources to land perceived as barbarian, such that it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that he took with him a complement of staff and clergy,[87] and the most up-to-date texts and traditions as decided by Rome necessary to establish an episcopal see in a land which had never been formally integrated into the Church.[88]

Palladius may have hoped to win Irish converts,[89] but, since he was sent to minister to those who already believed, the focus of his mission may have been on building the administrative framework of the embryonic Irish Church, establishing its authority over its own adherents, integrating into native political structures, and ensuring orthodoxy. In this light, we might then imagine that Palladius would have instilled the standard Continental practices concerning penance and confession in his new diocese,[90] which, as we have seen,

[86] Dáibhi Ó Cróinín, 'Who was Palladius 'first bishop of the Irish'?', *Peritia*, 12 (2000), pp. 214-216 and pp. 222-234.

[87] Over a century and a half later, another papal mission would land on the British Isles, that of Augustine and around forty monks. While a considerable amount of time had passed between Palladius and Augustine, it does not seem unlikely that the former would have been substantially less prepared by the papacy for his task than his better documented colleague. Augustine and his monks landed on the isle of Thanet in the kingdom of Kent in the spring of 596; see D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), p. 30.

[88] It has been persuasively argued that the Palladian mission was of particular concern to Rome for at least twenty years following its inception; see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: mission and primatial authority', in David N. Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 9. If the mission was indeed of enduring interest to Rome, there may have been regular contact between the metropolis and the new bishopric, which may have included the transmission of texts, material support, and trained clergy, if not from Rome itself, then from Gaul and Britain.

[89] It would be claimed that one of Celestine's greatest achievements was keeping the 'Roman island' (Britain) catholic, and making the 'barbarian island' (Ireland) Christian; Prosper of Aquitaine, *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio contra Collatorem*, J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina* (Paris, 1844-64), vol. 51, col. 271, §21. While this claim was propaganda in support of the papacy (consider the Patrician mission and the evidence of the 'First Synod of Patrick' for the endurance of paganism, discussed below), preaching and conversion may indeed have been an aim of the Palladian mission.

[90] Tradition suggests that Palladius' mission may have been centred in Wicklow, where we find the churches of Cell Fine, Tech na Románach (literally, 'house of the Romans'), and Domnach Airthe associated with him; see Alfred P. Symth, 'Bishop Patrick and the earliest Christian mission to Ireland', in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds.), *Christianity in Ireland: revisiting the story* (Dublin, 2002), p. 13, and Ludwig Bieler, 'The mission of Palladius: a comparative study of sources', *Traditio*, 6 (1948), p. 3. However, Palladius' mission may have been focused further north around the plain of the River Liffey, in what was, at that time, the territory of the Uí Garrchon, a kin-group that was later driven south by the expansionist conquests of the Uí Néill; see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 234-239. In support of this theory is the fact that the eastern seaboard of Ireland, a 'greater Leinster' before the Southern Uí Néill conquest of the territory north of the Liffey between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries, appears to have been in relatively close contact with Roman Britian, possessed *emporia*, and established colonies in Britian; *ibid*, pp. 156-163 and pp. 457-458; and Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (London, 1973), p. 133. The earliest missionaries

would have been quite strict on the sin of bloodshed, and enforce a punishment which was publicly humiliating and could be undertaken only once. Equally, he may have adopted the paradoxical stance of supporting violence under certain specific circumstances, as did Germanus of Auxerre. The papal legate, having built a wooden church in the midst of the army camp, is said to have led a small force of Britons, still wet from their baptism, against a numerically superior force of Saxons and Picts on Easter Sunday as a general.[91] Fooled into thinking that they faced a much larger force, the invaders fled in terror such that victory was achieved through faith and without bloodshed.[92] The entire episode is rather convenient, not only in its bloodless conclusion, but in the fact that the Britons are fighting a defensive battle against non-Christians, allowing Constantius of Lyon,[93] Germanus' hagiographer, to skirt around the delicate issue of a bishop leading men into violence. Palladius too may have had to have walked a fine line between the demands of his religion to enforce permanent penance on individual killers and the demands of secular authorities for his spiritual aid in their conflicts.

Palladius, a trusted disciple of Rome, would have sought to ensure the orthodoxy of his congregation, bringing them in line with practices in Britain, Gaul, and Italy. While he undoubtedly encountered some difficulties in establishing an episcopacy in a land of alien language, culture, and social organisation, he may yet have sought converts to his flock, actively seeking to win the Irish over to a new faith, just as the missions of Augustine in Canterbury and Aidan at Lindisfarne would in later generations. How successful the first bishop of the Irish was in his mission is difficult to determine as his record was eventually subsumed into the myth of the hero of Armagh: Saint Patrick. The memory of the papal mission, however, does seem to have survived for some time: Columbanus (d. 615) reminds Pope Boniface that the Catholic faith was delivered to the Irish by Rome itself,[94] and apparently makes no reference to Patrick in any of his surviving writings.[95] Indeed, one of

(Auxilius, Iserninus, and Secundinus), who may have been reinforcements for the Palladian mission, are all associated with churches in 'greater Leinster', some of which stood in Southern Uí Néill lands by the time of the hagiographers who appropriated these missionaries into the Patrician legend, and who were unaware of the historical Uí Garrchon presence further north; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 233-237.

[91] Constantius of Lyon, *Vita S. Germani*, René Borius (ed. and trans.), *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre* (Paris, 1965), pp. 112-205; §17.

[92] *Vita S. Germani*, §18.

[93] Constantius of Lyon wrote the *Vita S. Germani* under the direction of Germanus' successor at Lyons, Patiens; *Vita S. Germani* (dedicatory preface), p. 112.

[94] Columbanus, *Epistola V*, §3, in G. S. M. Walker (ed. and trans.), *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin, 1957), pp. 38-39.

[95] Charles Thomas, 'Palladius and Patrick', in Ailbhe MacShamhráin (ed.), *The Island of St Patrick: Church and Ruling Dynasties in Fingal and Meath, 400-1148* (Dublin, 2004), p. 15.

Patrick's hagiographers felt it necessary to explicitly dismiss the Palladian mission to make way for the true apostle of the Irish.[96] Irrespective of the paucity of information concerning this mission, there are two broad scenarios in terms of the early penitential practices of the Irish: either Palladius imposed penance and understood bloodshed along Continental Gaulish and Roman lines, or he arrived at a novel position to ease the Irish into the new faith. The former seems most likely, in which case confession and penance (for major sins at the very least) would have been episcopally controlled, public, and unrepeatable; all forms of killing would have been seen as a singular crime, and though intent may have been considered an important element, it may not have impacted on the actual punitive aspects of penance.

1.3 Patrick the Evangelist

In any conversation about Christianity in Ireland, one name stands preeminent: Patrick. As the heroic enemy of pagans, Christian missionary, and patron of the Irish, the image of Saint Patrick was created by the Church of Armagh to serve as political and religious propaganda to advance its claims of primacy over the various Churches of Ireland. Just as Palladius had to be 'rescued' from the towering figure of Patrick the saint, so too had Patrick the man. Behind this invention of Armagh, this confident smiter of druids, there lies a historical figure who is not, due to the fortuitous survival of two texts written by him, completely lost to us: his *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad milites Corotici*.[97] In the *Confessio*, Patrick informs us that he is the son of Calpurnius, son of Potitus; the former was a *diaconus* and a wealthy landowner near the unidentified town of *Bannaven Taburniae*, and the latter a *presbyter*.[98] During his youth Patrick committed some sin which was a cause of concern later in life when

[96] Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, in Ludwig Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 61-123, I 8 (7), pp. 72-73.

[97] Patrick, *Confessio* and *Epistola ad milites Corotici*, in Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum Santi Patricii Episcopi* (Dublin, 1993; reprinted as one volume from *Classica et Mediaevalia* 11 (1950) and 12 (1951)), pp. 56-90 and pp. 91-102 respectively. Also consulted were A. B. E. Hood (ed. and trans.), *St. Patrick: his writings and Muichu's Life* (London, 1978), pp. 23-38, with translation pp. 41-59; Ludwig Bieler, *The Works of St. Patrick, St. Secundinus, Hymn on St. Patrick* (New York, 1953), pp. 21-47; and David Howlett, *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Dublin, 1994), pp. 25-39 and pp. 51-93. It is interesting to note that the *Confessio* (but not the *Epistola*) is found in the Book of Armagh, along with the two Lives of Patrick by Muirchú and Tírechán, though it appears to have been edited to eliminate the human failings of the saint; see Bieler, *Libri Epistolarum Santi Patricii Episcopi*, pp. 18-19.

[98] '...patrem habui Calpornium diaconum filium quondam Potiti presbyteri, qui fuit uico bannauem taberniae; uillulam enim prope habuit, ubi ego capturam dedi. Annorum eram tunc fere sedecim', Patrick, *Confessio*, §1.

he was being judged to be raised to the rank of bishop.[99] Patrick writes that, at the age of sixteen, he was taken captive from his father's estate before being brought to Ireland along with thousands of others.[100] In his *Confessio*, he states that he and the others were deservedly taken into captivity as they did not keep God's commandments.[101] It was in Ireland, he informs us, while tending flocks of sheep alone, that he turned to God, praying fervently and fasting; after six years of living in that land, he writes that he was rewarded with a means of escape by God.[102] At this point, Patrick's recording of events becomes frustratingly vague: he may have visited Gaul,[103] where he may have entered a monastic order, and it is possible that he served as a priest in the east of Ireland as part of the Palladian mission,[104] but these hypotheses remain speculative. At some point, and with some difficulty, he was raised to the episcopacy, which may have granted him greater leeway to pursue his personal mission to evangelise the pagan Irish in the west and north of Ireland. It would seem unlikely that his British superiors would allow him to advance to such an important grade unless he was considered to follow orthodox teachings, recently reinforced by the mission of Germanus. Indeed, while Patrick may not have had the same level of education as the first bishop of the Irish, his episcopal seniors must have considered his training, and perhaps his pious zeal, sufficient evidence for promotion in spite of his unknown flaw. We might wonder if his belief in his personal destiny to save the Irish gave them pause, or swayed them in his favour, if, of course, he informed them of it. In any event, Patrick did return to Ireland as a bishop.

We do not know if there were official parameters to Patrick's mission; was he sent, as was Palladius, only to minister to the 'many thousands' of captured Christian Britons and the Irish who already believed in Christ in Ireland, with a view expanding the territory of the new Irish Church westward and northward, such that evangelising pagan Irish was simply his own personal aim, or was the spreading of the Gospel in that 'barbarian' land part of his brief from his superiors? Was his clear regard for monastic life an aspect of his personal beliefs, or of

[99] '…in morte et in incredulitate mansi donec ualde castigatus sum et in ueritate humiliatus sum a fame et nuditate, et cotidie', *ibid*., §27.
[100] '...Hiberione in captiuitate adductus sum cum tot milia hominum', *ibid*, §1.
[101] '...secundum merita nostra, quia a Deo recessimus et praecepta eius non custodiuimus et sacerdotibus nostris non oboedientes fuimus', *ibid*, §1.
[102] *Ibid*., §§16-18.
[103] This is hinted at, but remains unclear, in Patrick, *Confessio*, §43. See also, Clare Stancliffe, 'Patrick [St Patrick, Pádraig] (*fl*. 5th cent.)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 43, p. 72.
[104] Stancliffe, 'Patrick', p. 75.

the British Church?[105] Why was he raised in rank in Britain and not in Ireland; was the Irish Church so underdeveloped that it did not have the requisite number of bishops necessary to perform the rite, or did Patrick wish to circumvent its authority? What Patrick chose to tell us may not be the full picture, he most likely shaped the facts to suit his personal narrative in his *Confessio*, yet we are left with little other evidence to judge him against. Patrick and Palladius, in terms of the information which has survived, act as curious mirrors: of the latter, we know who sent him officially and why, but nothing of his mission in Ireland, and of the former, we have a personal (if brief) account of the mission, but no official reasons for his efforts. It would seem unlikely that the bishops of Britain would consecrate a bishop and allow him to pursue a personal vision in a foreign land over which they had little or no authority; perhaps they were inspired, or even encouraged, by Palladius and his successors to send trained clergy to Ireland. Whatever the case may be, it would seem careless and irregular of the British bishops to allow Patrick, as a bishop, to go alone to a land that they would have considered uncivilised and primitive. We can easily imagine that, like Palladius before him, Patrick the bishop arrived in Ireland with an entourage (though his supporters may have been gathered to him by charismatic zeal rather than organisational necessity), and, more importantly, with the materials and texts necessary for such an undertaking. Patrick informs us that he presented gifts to kings and paid their sons to travel with him, presumably as bodyguards, which would suggest that his mission was rather well-funded,[106] though it also appears that he used his family's wealth to finance his efforts,[107] which may lead us to

[105] Patrick, *Confessio*, §41. It may be that the development of the great monastic centres in Ireland are rooted in the monastic connections of Patrick and Palladius, and even Germanus, via later missionaries from Britain; see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 224-225.

[106] Patrick, *Confessio*, §52.

[107] Patrick states that he gave up his homeland and family, and his free birth, which may suggest that he sold his inheritance and material possessions to support his mission; Patrick, *Epistola*, §1, and *Confessio*, §37. It has been suggested that Patrick's mission to Ireland was a means to escape the onerous duties of following in his father's footsteps into the hereditary position of *decurion*, and that he brought slaves with him to Ireland as moveable wealth; Roy Flechner, 'Patrick's reasons for leaving Britain', in F. Edmunds and P. Russell (eds.), *Tome: studies in medieval Celtic history and law in honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 132-133. We might wonder how burdensome such an office would be for one to contemplate abandoning what one considered civilisation for barbarity, where life and limb were to be risked (as we are informed by Patrick, *Confessio*, §55), not simply financial ruin. Furthermore, considering that Patrick had himself been a slave, we might also imagine that he would have sympathy for their plight, and so be less likely to personally own slaves, especially since he admonishes Coroticus for selling Christians into slavery; Patrick, *Epistola*, §§12-14. Are we to imagine that Patrick purposefully kept pagan and Christian slaves, using the former only in transactions which involved pagan Irish individuals, keeping the Christian slaves for labour or transactions involving other free Christians? Under such circumstances, it would have been against his economic interest to convert his non-Christian slaves, which would run contrary to the purpose of his mission. It would seem far more likely that Patrick used some other form of material wealth, such as silver, since slaves could run off (which he would know from personal experience), revolt, or even die. Silver ingots stamped with a Christian symbol have been discovered from the pre-Patrician era in the west of Ireland (see n. 83 above), which suggests that silver was available in sufficiently large quantities to be used as a tradable commodity for services.

conclude that he was acting independently, or supplementing the endowments, of the British and nascent Irish Churches; indeed, like many a charismatic preacher, Patrick may have survived on the donated wealth of converts.

The character of Patrick's mission was, most likely, very different to that of Palladius': the latter had been sent to Ireland to administer to those who already believed, while the former was, seemingly, on a personal undertaking to convert pagans to Christianity. It would seem probable that Patrick would have had to have adapted orthodox Christian practices to make them acceptable, even understandable, to a pagan Irish audience. While Patrick's own life may have served as a penitential example to later generations (he believed that he was punished by God for his religious laxity, and, after a certain number of years of exile, fasting, and hardship, he was redeemed), he does not, in his own writings, expressly inform us of any penance he imposed on members of his flock, or what manner such penance would have taken. He does, however, offer us one instance where he demands that a certain group undertake penance for their sins: the letter to the soldiers of Coroticus. In this text, Patrick commands that the soldiers return an undisclosed number of Irish Christians whom they had kidnapped and repent for the murders they committed during their raid.[108] From the very beginning Patrick informs us of his episcopal authority.[109] He declares the soldiers of Coroticus to be 'fellow-citizens of demons', and that they 'live in death',[110] denouncing them as homicides.[111] These soldiers are described as blood-thirsty men guilty of a violent crime rather than fellow-citizens of Patrick or of holy Rome;[112] considering that they are specifically noted as being companions of the Irish and the Picts, it can be concluded that

[108] Patrick, *Epistola*, §§2-4.
[109] *Ibid*., §1.
[110] '...civibus daemoniorum... Ritu hostili in morte vivunt', *ibid*., §2. This may be the earliest example of the 'sons of death' motif found in various other Irish Christian texts, some of which will be discussed later in the thesis. Patrick's reference to the soldiers of Coroticus as 'living in death' would, at first glance, appear to correlate to the argument that the term 'son of death' meant 'brigand' or 'warrior'; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 299-300. However, Patrick also notes that he once 'lived in death', '...sed in morte et in incredulitate mansi', Patrick, *Confessio*, §27, so we may assume that this simply denotes living in sin rather than brigandage. The *Ritu hosili* element has been translated variously as 'Like our enemies, they live in death...', Bieler, *The Works of St. Patrick*, p. 41, or 'By hostile behaviour they live in death...', Howlett, *The Book of Letters*, p. 27. If we take the opening part of the phrase, *Ritu hositli*, and interpret it rather as 'by hostile ritual', it may be that Patrick has provided us with first-hand evidence for the ritualised brigandage described in his own and the Brigitine hagiographical traditions (this will be explored later in Chapter 7). Though this practice is evidenced by Irish texts, there may have been certain social similarities between the British, Picts, and Irish which could have allowed for certain cross-cultural exchanges, such as ritualised brigandage.
[111] Reminding the reader of the commandment, 'Non occides', Patrick states 'Homicida non potest esse cum Christo. Qui odit fratrem suum homicida adscribitur'; Patrick, *Epistola*, §9. This final statement (taken from 1 John 3:15) is paralleled in *Pen. Vinn*., §8, *Paen. Amb*., IV §2, *Paen. Cumm*., IV §4, and *Paen. Bi*., IV §4. This is not offered as evidence of a tradition stemming from Patrick, but rather of a concept which remained popular from the fifth to the eighth century.
[112] Patrick, *Epistola*, §1.

they are Britons,[113] and that they are Christian, otherwise Patrick's threats of excommunication would be empty. Patrick entreats all who read his letter (the clearest suggestion that this was not meant to be a private correspondence between him and Coroticus) not to eat or drink with these men, nor to accept their alms 'until they have relentlessly performed penance by shedding of tears satisfactory to God', and free those whom they captured.[114] Here Patrick provides us with evidence that, among the Christian British at least, alms-giving, penance, and the shedding of tears were practised,[115] rituals which he would have been attempting to propagate in Ireland. Patrick's letter to the soldiers of Coroticus is (by the simple consequence of the fact that we have no surviving sources from anyone else in Ireland in this period) the earliest evidence for penance in an Irish context, even if it is not imposed on Irish Christians; presumably, Patrick would not have removed penitential discipline from his efforts to (in his mind) save the Irish from paganism and sin.

It would appear that Patrick's main concerns in his letter to the soldiers of Coroticus are the release of captured Christians and the correct punishment of those who had seized them and murdered others. The demanded punishment is not categorised or defined, that is to say, we do not know how the sins themselves would be confessed, the type or duration of penance each crime merited, or how such penance would be performed. All that we can tell is that, in this specific instance, Patrick is condemning the shedding of the blood and enslavement of Christians by other Christians, which is not an unexpected sentiment for a bishop to espouse. With such scant evidence, it must be assumed that Patrick was largely orthodox in his penitential practices. One might infer from his demand that men of piety should not seek the favour of these soldiers, eat or drink with them, or accept alms from them until they have undertaken penance and release their captives that there was some publicly visible aspect to the penitential process;[116] how else would the pious men know that the soldiers had accepted their burden, and later been redeemed (presuming, of course that Patrick was successful in his plea, which seems unlikely)?[117] We might assume that public confession was to be expected, but Patrick's letter compromises our very investigation, as

[113] *Ibid.*, §2.
[114] '...donec crudeliter <per> paenitentiam effusis lacrimis...', *ibid.*, §7.
[115] The basis for the requirement for penitent tears may have been the 'baptism of tears' advocated by Gregory of Nazianzen (d. 389/390), which was also discussed by John Cassian (d. 435) and Caesarius of Arles (d. 542), though it should be noted that the writings of Caesarius were unlikely to have influenced Patrick as the former was born around the time the latter died; see O'Loughlin, 'Penitentials and pastoral care', p. 97. The shedding of tears as an aspect of penance is noted in the first Irish penitential; see *Pen. Vinn.*, §12 and §29.
[116] Patrick, *Epistola*, §7.
[117] Patrick states in the letter that this is his second attempt to secure the freedom of the captive Christians, the first one having been dismissed with laughter; *ibid.*, §3.

private confession was out of the question once he accused the soldiers of specific crimes. We might also lament that Patrick was not more specific in describing what penance he expected of these men, but this may be due to the fact that there was not yet a defined or systematic punishment for each crime, or that the punishment was so well-known as to not merit mentioning. Patrick was, in essence, calling for the excommunication of these men until they agreed to suffer penance, which would have been public and under clear episcopal authority. What Patrick would have made of the killing of non-Christians remains unclear, but he condemned the killing of Christians in the context of this raid, and he would have, presumably, condemned the killing of a Christian in any context; given that there was, as yet, no practical division between killing as an individual and killing as a member of a larger group in the Insular Churches, Patrick may have expected a lay killer to undertake the same penances he demanded of the soldiers of Coroticus. Killing was killing, and it had to be atoned for through laborious public penance.

1.4 Four British Texts

Patrick's letter and confession stand as a glimmer of light in the 'dark age' that is the history of the conversion of Ireland, until the veritable nova of writing which began in the mid-sixth century. One example of this new vigour in Hiberno-Latin material is the very first penitential, which was, it would appear, a new departure in the relationship between the Irish Church and the laity, as shall be discussed later. It set the Irish Church on a course of organising and categorising the sins of men, lay and clerical, and the penances required to wash such perceived blemishes on their souls away, and would eventually offer the opportunity of redemption to even the bloodiest of men. The first author of this new genre of writing was a certain Finnian, yet, while his approach was novel, it appears to have been set in an emerging landscape of thought developing in Britain around this period. Four relatively short texts concerning aspects of penitential matters have survived from early sixth century Britain:[118] *Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia*,[119] *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae*,[120] *Sinodus Luci*

[118] On the dating of these texts see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 3, and Kenney, *Sources*, p. 239. Kenney notes that there is some debate over the ascription of Gildas as author of the eponymous penitential text; Kenney, *Sources*, p. 239, n. 248.
[119] *Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 60-65.
[120] *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 66-67.

Victorie,[121] and *Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis*.[122] The *Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia* and *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae* are concerned only with the penance of monks and clergy, while the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* and *Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis* apply to the clergy and the laity.[123]

The *Praefatio Gildae* condemns even the thought of bloodshed, stating that wrath breeds murder, and that any individual who 'holds anger in his heart is in (a state of) death'.[124] If they cannot purge this anger after a fast of forty days, they must fast again for two forty-day periods. If this is unsuccessful, they 'shall be cut off from the body as a rotten member'.[125] No mention is made of one who successfully turns such a thought into deed; it may have been that they were covered by other established ordinances. The *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae* makes no mention of bloodshed, and is primarily concerned with the penance for monks and clerics who have committed the sins of sexual intercourse or theft. This text is interesting, however, as it provides the earliest reference to exile as a penitential demand in an Insular context.[126] It must be underlined that these two texts are focused on the clergy and monks, those who have taken specific vows of obedience to the Church, and so the penitence that they undertake is part of their continuous striving for perfection, and not the singular, publicly purgative act of a layman.

One of the decrees of the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* explicitly refers to the sinner laying down his arms, so we may be confident that the bishops who drew up this text expected that they could impose penance on the laity. With this in mind, this text makes the first overt reference to bloodshed which may involve the laity: a punishment of three years penance is

[121] *Sinodus Luci Victorie*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 68-69.
[122] *Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 70-73.
[123] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 3. Layfolk are explicitly referred to in *Dauid*, §10. In *Sinodus Luci*, §4, the rejection of arms as penance for a certain sin is demanded, and §9 advocates the deduction of one year from each penitential prescription if the individual in question has not taken a holy vow, which would imply that the laity are in question.
[124] 'Nam qui iram corde multo tempore retinet, in morte est', *Praefatio Gildae*, §17. This offers, perhaps, an interesting parallel to the decision of the Synod of Neocaesarea (314-325) which stated that a man who has sinned in thought does not have to undertake public penance; *Synod of Neocaesarea*, §4. The stipulation of the *Praefatio Gildae* may be a consequence of the greater spiritual demands place on the clergy and monks to remain pure of thought, while the synodal decree may be, perhaps, a subtle criticism of the laity who were deemed to be hardly capable of restraining themselves of murderous thoughts. While the *Praefatio Gildae* makes no comment as to how the act of killing was to be punished, it may have been the case that the decision of the synod of Épaone to commit a deacon or priest who committed a capital offence to monastic confinement and to deny the offender communion until near death was known in Britain (see n. 77).
[125] '...si idem fecerit, abscidatur a corpore sicut membrum putredum, quia furor homicidium nutrit', *Praefatio Gildae*, §17.
[126] 'Cum muliere uel cum uiro pecans quis expellatur ut alterius patriae cenubio uiuat...', *Sinodus Aq.*, §1.

applied if one kills another from sudden anger and without forethought.[127] While no mention is made of premeditated killing, it cannot be presumed that such an act was not legislated for; this synod may have been accounting for a developing nuance in terms of bloodshed, knowing that the penance for premeditated killing was already regulated by prior synods or Church practice. Thirteen years of penance is imposed upon any Christian who aids barbarians, and, according to this synod, if this aid results in the 'effusion of blood' or 'dire captivity' of Christians, the offender must perform penance and lay down arms until death.[128] If the offender had planned to bring the barbarians to the Christians, he must do penance for the rest of his life.[129] Once again, we can see here a recognition of agency in the culpability of the offending party: while guiding barbarians is a serious offence, it appears to be suggested that this may be done without intending bloodshed or captivity, though, if such deeds were to occur, it would result in the permanent disarming of the reprobate guide. We may see here an implication that Christians were forced to guide invaders to settlements, such that the fact that they did so under duress might mitigate their crime to some degree, while a Christian who had intended to aid the barbarians in their actions was fully complicit in the wrong-doing, and so the penalty they must suffer is most severe. The final ordinance of this synod states that, while these specific penitential punishments apply to one who has made a vow of perfection, they can be imposed upon one who has not taken a vow, though the periods of penance may be reduced accordingly.[130]

In the *Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis* we find a series of penalties for the sins of homicide, fornication, and fraud whose terms of penance depend on the rank of the offender: thirteen years penance for a bishop, seven for a presbyter, six for a deacon, and four for a monk.[131] It is noted in the text itself that these penalties are less severe than those laid down by earlier (unspecified) authorities.[132] A priest or deacon who has caused the death of another cannot offer the sacrifice, hold the chalice, or be raised in rank.[133] It seems curious that such offenders are not stripped of their rank, or dispatched to a permanent monastic retreat,[134] for such grievous sins, and we might even wonder as to why such ordinances were necessary;

[127] *Sinodus Luci*, §2.
[128] *Ibid.*, §4. Presumably these barbarians are pagan Anglo-Saxon invaders.
[129] *Ibid.*
[130] *Ibid.*, §9. Such reductions may have been at the discretion of a bishop.
[131] *Dauid*, §7.
[132] We are informed that the *antiqi sancti* decreed that for capital sins a bishop should suffer twenty-four years penance, while a presbyter must undertake twelve. For the same crime, seven years penance is imposed upon a deacon, virgin, reader, or monk, with four years levied on a layman; *ibid.*, §10.
[133] *Ibid.*, §12.
[134] Consider the stipulation of the Council of Épaone concerning such matters; n. 77 above.

how often were clergymen killing other people to warrant a precise series of penances, and why were they reduced in severity? May it have been due to the pressures of the expansionist, pagan Anglo-Saxons or Irish and Pictish raiders, an implicit acceptance that clergymen may have had to defend themselves by violent means (or even actively participated in conflict), coupled with the fact that the bloodshed which accompanied the advance of such invaders denuded the British Church of trained clergy such that it could not afford to dismiss them or enforce exile? While we may not know the rationale behind such decrees, they were not universal within the Latin Church, and may have been a British response towards unique circumstances. The *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* also demands that anyone who puts a man to death must undergo three years of penance.[135] This penitential term echoes that of the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* for an act of killing, as mentioned above, though the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* does not carry the nuance of the deed being done in anger, which may suggest that the decisions of the synod are a later development such that this relatively brief term became the accepted penance for the emerging sense of a non-premeditated killing and premeditated killing would carry a more demanding term. For the first time, it is in the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* that we are given some insight into what penance may have entailed among the early sixth-century Church in Britain: in the first year the penitent must lie (presumably when sleeping) on the ground, in the second they are allowed a board, and in the third they lie upon a stone.[136] They are permitted to eat only 'bread and water and salt and some pease porridge'.[137] Alternatives to this regime are offered: thirty three-day periods with food and bed as noted previously, or with special fasts from nones to nones, or one might undertake the three years penance as stipulated, but with the addition of half a pint of beer or milk with the food every second night, with regular supplication to God.[138] It is interesting that, in terms of the proscriptive texts that will be examined in the course of this thesis, it is only the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* which lays out the actual practice of penance; was it so common before as to be understood, but then the practice faded such that the writers of this text thought people needed to be reminded of the correct procedures, and then became so popular once more that it did not merit noting? Or was it necessary to elucidate the demands of monastic penance for a laity and clergy who were increasingly included in the system but would otherwise be

[135] The decree begins by specifically referring to members of the clergy and virgins who fall into ruin before discussing an undefined group who commit murder, fornication with animals, incest, or adultery; '...cuiuslibet hominis hominem ad mortem tradentis...', *Dauid*, §11. This indistinct group is most plausibly the laity, especially as the religious murderer is legislated for in *Dauid*, §7.
[136] *Ibid.*, §11.
[137] '...solo pane et aqua et sale et leguminis talipulo uescatur', *ibid.*
[138] *Ibid.*

ignorant of the rigours of the practice? This latter option seems most likely as not all members of the clergy may have been familiar with monastic fixed-term penance, both in terms of undertaking it themselves and applying it to the laity.

1.5 The 'First Synod of Patrick'

Returning to Ireland, it is clear that the practice of penance and the manner in which the sin of bloodshed was expiated was of similar concern to the Irish Church as it was to the British in this period, as demonstrated by the decrees of a synod attributed to Saint Patrick. This 'First Synod of Patrick' is a curious text, as, among other issues, its authorship and date have been debated with some vigour for half a century without any clear resolution. Kenney, in his great compilation of ecclesiastical texts, stated that the 'First Synod of Patrick' is at least from the early days of the Irish Church,[139] and, thirty-four years later, Bieler accepted its authenticity as a Patrician work, dating the text to 457, which is based on the annalistic evidence of the obits of two other individuals in whose names the synod was called, Auxilius and Iserninus.[140] He also notes that fourteen of the canons in the text are referred to in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* under the name of Patrick.[141] Kenney posits that this document was intended for a Church which was not yet fully organised, where bishops had limited authority and were operating in regions where paganism was still active.[142] Around the time that Bieler produced his edition of the text, Binchy and Hughes both argued for a later date, but differed in the exact period. Hughes suggested the second quarter of the sixth century,[143] while Binchy proposed that the text should be placed in the late sixth or early seventh century.[144] Binchy offered a detailed argument against a Patrician origin for the text,

[139] Kenney, *Sources*, p. 169.
[140] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 2. Auxilius and Iserninus, along with Secundinus, supposedly arrived in Ireland in 438/439 to assist Patrick. Secundinus died in 447, his companions in 459 and 468 respectively; *The Annals of Ulster, to A.D. 1131; part 1: text and translation*, Séan Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds. and trans.) (Dublin, 1983), 447.1, 459.1, and 468.1.
[141] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 2.
[142] Kenney, *Sources*, p. 170.
[143] Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), pp. 44-52.
[144] Binchy offers a detailed criticism against the Patrician authenticity of the text, and dates it to the seventh century, in D. A. Binchy, 'Patrick and His Biographers: Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), pp. 45-48, a position which he reiterates in *idem*, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', *Studia Hibernica*, 8 (1968), p. 49 and pp. 58-59. Binchy agrees with Hughes that the canons are from the sixth century, and were 'enhanced' in the seventh century to suit Armagh's claims. Stevenson concurs with the sixth century date, but notes that it is

noting a specialised understanding of Irish legal practices which, he believed, would not have seeped into the fabric of the embryonic Irish Church.[145] He also noted the suggestion of a high degree of organisation within the Church itself, which appears to have had numerous bishops ruling over defined territories, a situation that would run contrary to the idea of a rudimentary or developing ecclesiastical infrastructure, or perhaps even the (possibly) *ad hoc* nature of the Patrician mission.[146] Binchy argued that this document is rather the first salvo on behalf of the reformist *Romani* against the Insular traditionalists,[147] as it demands that the Roman tonsure be applied and bans British clerics from ministering in Ireland, unless they arrive with a letter,[148] presumably containing assurances of their orthodoxy and right to travel. Binchy also argued that the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, in which fourteen canons taken from this synodal decree are ascribed to Patrick, cannot be trusted as a corroborating source since it acknowledges Patrick as the author of many canons of which he was not.[149] Binchy held that the preface to these sixth-century synodal decrees is a forgery attached in the seventh century, possibly by Armagh.[150]

In his summary of the debate, Dumville points out that the synod in question need not have been of 'national' status, but was perhaps a provincial council, when he argues for varying degrees of organisational development (or indeed presence) of the Christian Church across the island of Ireland,[151] neatly skirting around Hughes' argument. This approach re-opens the debate as it allows for the existence of a more complex ecclesiastical structure in the east of Ireland as early as the fifth century, which could produce such synodal decrees, facing a less thoroughly Christianised West.[152] In the same vein, Binchy's interpretation of the text as being a reformist attack on Insular traditions may also be seen as nothing more than the efforts of an ecclesiastical province which is still in contact with pagans, where

---

contested; J. Stevenson, 'The Beginnings of Literacy in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 89 C (1989), p. 153.

[145] Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', pp. 51-54.

[146] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Rather amusingly, Binchy had previously declined to offer a detailed proof of why the text must be a product of the seventh century as it 'would mean taxing the reader's patience beyond endurance', preferring instead to discuss why it cannot be from the fifth century; Binchy, 'Patrick and His Biographers', p. 46.

[147] Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', p. 56.

[148] *Synodus I S. Patricii*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, §6 and §33. This ban on British clergy may have been due to Augustine's failure to convince the British Church to accept conformity with Rome in the first years of the seventh century; see Kathleen Hughes, 'The Celtic Church and the Papacy', in C. H. Lawrence (ed.), *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1965), pp. 11-12.

[149] Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', pp. 57-58.

[150] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

[151] David N. Dumville, 'St Patrick at his 'First Synod'?', in Dumville, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993*, pp. 176-178.

[152] *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

monastic practices are relatively new, and missionaries are still arriving from Britain to ensure conformity within its own jurisdiction. Binchy's argument concerning the nuanced understanding of the native legal system, which is to say that the bishops who produced this text were fully aware of early Irish laws concerning sureties,[153] presses him to the position that the text must be later. The passage in question appears to have recognised the enforcing of a surety by force of arms, which Binchy identifies as *naidm*, a custom which is not found in Roman law.[154] Binchy himself notes that another stipulation in the text, concerning a cleric held 'under the yoke of servitude', would appear to be from an era before which the clergy in Ireland had achieved privileged status in Irish law, admitting that this evidence may suggest that Hughes is in fact correct.[155] Charles-Edwards, having posited a re-dating of the beginning of the Patrician mission to the second, rather than the first, half of the fifth century, is confident that the Synod could have been held within a generation or two after Patrick.[156] With the Patrician association soundly dismissed by the complexity of the organisation presumed by the document and its awareness of secular law, coupled with the plausibility of this text being the product of a more ecclesiastically developed east and the lack of Church primacy in secular law, it would appear that the document was generated as a result of an early sixth century synod, later amended by Armagh to suggest Patrician authorship. This synod would then be roughly contemporaneous with the four British documents, and with one of the candidates for the authorship of the first Penitential (that is, Finnian of Clonard, with the other possible author, Finnian of Mag mBili, being active slightly later).[157]

Turning to the text itself, and examining it within the parameters of the present thesis, we may be able to draw out a few more shards of evidence. This synod decreed that any Christian who has killed, fornicated, or sworn before an *aruspex* in the custom of the gentiles (which is to say, pagans) must undergo one year of penance.[158] Once this term had been

[153] Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', pp. 52-53.
[154] *Ibid.*, p. 52. The passage in question is *Synodus Pat.*, §8. It should be noted that Bieler regards this decree as an interpolation; see Ludwig Bieler, '*Interpretationes Patricianae*', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 107 (1967), pp. 9-10. The fact that a third of the canons have been identified as later interpolations has led to the argument that this is in fact evidence for the whole text belonging to a later period; see Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', p. 54.
[155] Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', pp. 53-54, in reference to *Synodus Pat.*, §7.
[156] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 239 and pp. 245-247. It has been argued that the date associated with Patrick's arrival in Ireland is an invention to suppress the Palladian mission in favour of Armagh: see David N. Dumville, 'The Date 432', in Dumville, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993*, pp. 39-43.
[157] This document, and the complexities of its authorship, will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.
[158] 'Christianus qui occiderit aut fornicationem fecerit aut more gentilium ad aruspicem iurauerit, per singular cremina annum penitentiae agat', *Synodus Pat.*, §14. Note that Bieler translates *occiderit* as 'has committed murder', yet it may be rendered more broadly as 'has killed'; since no other form of bloodshed (which is to say,

completed, the penitent was to present himself, with witnesses, to a *sacerdos* to be released from his obligation.[159] The synod also decreed that a cleric who arranges to kill a rival cleric with the aid of a proxy is himself guilty of homicide and is excommunicated.[160] As noted previously, there is also a suggestion that if a cleric chose to enforce the payment of a *naidm* surety by force of arms (a consequence of which might be killing) he was to be considered to be 'outside the Church',[161] which is to say, excommunicated. It is not stated specifically in either decree that the offending cleric can be readmitted to the Church after undergoing penance, but we are told in another section that an excommunicated cleric must pray alone, and cannot offer the holy sacrifice or consecrate until he has corrected himself,[162] a path which may have been open to the conspiratorial cleric and the surety-enforcing cleric. We are not told how long this correction would be and what form it would take, but it may have been that it was only for one year, as the penance for killing refers to acts committed by a *Christianus*,[163] a term which does not specify if the individual concerned was lay or clerical. That said, considering the later evidence of Finnian's Penitential,[164] it may have been the case that a cleric's punishment would have been greater as his fall from grace, and indeed his 'reward' in heaven, may have been considered to be more substantial.

The 'First Synod of Patrick' reveals that, in whatever region the council was held, killing was a forgivable act which carried a strikingly brief term of penance for a lay killer,[165] and, most surprisingly, that the clergy were engaging in levels of violence and treachery that merited specific consideration by the assembly. Though these acts would have been publicly visible, and though we are not informed of any process of confession, it would appear that penance was performed in private. A Christian who had committed the sin of homicide had to

---

manslaughter, or killing by accident or in combat) is discussed, we may assume that such nuance has yet to enter the debate, and all bloodshed is treated as once crime.

[159] 'Impleto cum testibus ueniat anno penitentiae et postea resoluetur a sacerdote', *ibid.*, §14. This passage may also be an interpolation; see above, n. 154.

[160] *Ibid.*, §31. Note that here the terms involved are *interficiendum* (concerning the act of killing), which may carry strongly negative connotations, and *homicidia* (what the cleric is deemed to be), which may lend support to the more general translation of *occiderit* as discussed above, n. 158.

[161] 'Nam si armis conpugnauerit cum illo, merito extra ecclesiam conputetur', *ibid.*, §8.

[162] '...donec se faciat emendatum', *ibid.*, §28.

[163] See above, n. 158.

[164] This will be discussed in the following chapter.

[165] By comparison, the synod of Épaone (517) affirmed the decision of the council of Ancyra (314) to demand the permanent exclusion of wilful murders from communion until the end of their days and seven or five years for non-premeditated killing; see *Concilium Epaonense*, §31 and *The Synod of Ancyra*, §23. Even if Épaone had not yet been transmitted to Ireland by the time of the 'First Synod of Patrick', the teachings of Ancyra on this matter, based on the even earlier synod of Elvira (305/306), were probably known in Rome, and so could have been brought to Ireland as part of the Palladian mission; for the relevant decree of synod of Elvira, see *The Synod of Elvira*, §5.

bring two witnesses with him to a *sacerdos* to be absolved, which might suggest that he was not performing his penance under direct episcopal oversight or before a congregation, as might be expected under the standard Continental practice, but perhaps privately such that it was necessary for others to vouch for his acts of penitence. It may have been the case that this *sacerdos* was the local priest, but, in light of the manner in which the term is used elsewhere in the text, it could also plausibly imply one of episcopal rank.[166] Indeed, it seems most likely that the two witnesses were the sinners' local priest and an attendant cleric who would testify before a bishop who held the authority to release the penitent man.

The consequence of penance is left ambiguous in the text: are we to assume that the penitent, now cleansed of sin, would have to maintain a life of perfection for fear of risking their immortal soul again, or could they to return to their lay life, chastised but, in theory, free to sin and confess again? Given the proximity in time to the Palladian and Patrician missions, and the episcopal nature of the document, it might be taken for granted that it was expected that the penitent killer would strive to remain pure after reconciliation; the phrasing of the decree, however, points to an interesting possibility. It is stated that, after having completed their penance with the testimony of two witnesses, the penitent killer is released by the bishop.[167] Though it is tenuous to base an argument on the interpretation of a single term, 'releasing' the penitent layman may imply that he was free to return to his lay life, as one might expect from the Penitential of Finnian (as shall be discussed presently), such that this text may be a stepping-stone away from the traditional model of penance to the Insular. This would lend further weight to the position that this is not a genuine fifth-century Patrician text, but is rather indicative of the expansion of monastic penance into the lay world as depicted in Insular documents from the mid-sixth century onwards.

The fact that the *Synodus I S. Patricii* does not appear to draw on the ideas of the four British texts or contemporary Gallic councils concerning penance might suggest that it predates the arrival of such thought to Ireland. If this synod did indeed take place in the early

[166] The first instance of the term is in reference to any 'clericus ab hostiario usque ad sacerdotem' who does not wear a tunic, cut his hair in the Roman fashion, or ensure that his wife wear a veil is to be held in contempt by the laity and set apart from the Church; *Synodus Pat.*, §6. Though Bieler translates the second grade as 'priest', it would be more logical to assume that the whole clergy, from ostiary (the lowest rank) to bishop (the highest), is meant. In the second instance (see n. 159), it would appear that the penitent is to be released from his penitential term by the individual in question, who may yet have been a bishop. The fact that a *sacerdos* is noted to be married in §6 might have led Bieler to conclude that the cleric was not a bishop, but celibacy may not have been mandatory in the sixth-century Irish Church, and a bishop (and, indeed, a priest) may have had a wife from whom he abstained; see Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 41-43, p. 48, and pp. 51-52.
[167] '...resoluetur a sacerdote', *ibid.*, §14. Note that Bieler translates this as '[he shall] then be freed of his obligation by a priest'; Bieler, *Synodus I S. Patricii*, p. 57.

sixth century, the Irish Church may have already begun the process of transitioning from more orthodox models of penance to the provision of monastic fixed-term penance to the laity. Under such circumstances, the relevant synodal decrees of this text may be an early attempt to set standards for such penances under episcopal jurisdiction since none were yet known to have existed. Considering that the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* and the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* appear to hold in common the idea that a killer should undergo three years of penance (though they disagree on who, and what form of killing, this would apply to)[168] may illustrate a sense of a nebulous agreement on matters of killing in the British Church, but there was as yet no concrete decisions on what penance a killer, lay or clerical, should suffer. Since the *Synodus I S. Patricii* demands a startlingly brief penance for killing in comparison to contemporary texts and later penitentials, perhaps a reflection of a missionary Church tempering its demands to win and retain converts, and also contains unique curiosities (such as clerics who kill by proxy or who secure their debts by force of arms), it may be the case that this synod presents us with a distinctive voice, an illustration of the earliest attempt to offer Irish solutions to Irish problems.

1.6 Continental and British Influences on Irish Penitential Thought

Before we turn to the first true Penitential handbooks, let us review what we can know of the practice of penance in the Insular Churches. Presumably, Palladius and Patrick would have enforced the Continental practice of penance, perhaps with a Gallic or British flair respectively, in fifth-century Ireland, and we know from Patrick's own writings that he believed that, as a bishop,[169] he had the authority to demand penance of a war-leader's soldiers, and that he condemned bloodshed among Christians. Britain had, by Patrick's lifetime, not long been abandoned by the Empire, and the papacy was still playing an active

[168] This notion also appears in the Penitential of Finnian, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

[169] Patrick, *Epistola*, §1. It is noted in numerous synods that only a bishop has the power to reconcile a penitent or an excommunicant (except in extreme circumstances, whereupon a priest may do so): see *The Synod of Elvira*, §53; *The Synod of Arles*, §16; *The Synod of Nicaea*, §5; *The Synod of Carthage*, §4; and *The Synod of Hippo*, §30, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol.1, p. 159, p. 195, and p. 386, and vol. 2, pp. 68-69, p. 390, and p. 399. A bishop may have been the only individual with the right or authority to impose penance, a fact which Patrick is highlighting: see *The Synod of Elvira*, §32; and *The Synod of Hippo*, §30, Hefele, *Councils*, vol.1, p. 149, and vol. 2, p. 399. The stipulation that only a bishop can hear confession and administer penance is also found much later in the early medieval period in the decrees of Chalons, which illustrates a consistency in Continental practices (or perhaps a lapse in correct practices which had to be corrected); see *Concilium Cabilonense, 647-653*, in de Clercq, *Les canons*, vol. 2, pp. 550-565; §8.

role in the affairs of the Church of that island. Ireland was predominantly pagan, though with a significant Christian population. By the following century, new pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had became the dominant powers in much of Britain, a catastrophic situation for the Christian Britons, which may have encouraged the British Church to reconsider the necessity of violence, and the degrees of culpability in the agency of bloodshed. In contrast to this sudden return of paganism to Britain with the Anglo-Saxons, Ireland would appear to have been rather thoroughly Christianised by the second half of the sixth century.[170]

The fact that issues concerning penitential matters were submitted for debate at synods ranging from Asia Minor to Ireland, from the fourth century to the sixth, illustrate that it remained a complicated, and perhaps divisive, issue for the Christian Church. It was necessary, time and again, to reiterate that the common clergy could not release a penitent from their obligations except under extreme circumstances, demonstrating that the episcopal control of this rite was frequently challenged, or simply ignored, conceivably out of convenience. In terms of bloodshed, Continental thought appears to have remained consistent: the Synods of Elvira and of Ancyra, reiterated by that of Épaone (a geographic and temporal breadth which may imply widespread and continued consent), demanded seven and five years for premeditated and accidental killing respectively,[171] though such a sin could only be forgiven once, and required public confession and penance. The nuance of intent as a key factor in the gravity of the sin slowly developed in importance. In early sixth century Britain, a different consensus appears to have formed on matters of bloodshed: as noted above, the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* and *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* both offer three year terms of penance for bloodshed, a significant reduction on their Continental precursors, though the former specifies that it is concerned with killing that is not a result of malice and the term can be decreased for a layman, while the latter seemingly treats all killing as one sin. This three year penance for killing may have been well established in the British Church, though there was some disagreement concerning whom it applied to and under what circumstances, a fact which will be demonstrated further in the next chapter concerning the early Insular penitential handbooks. It is remarkable that the earliest Irish contribution to the debate on the

[170] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 240.
[171] *The Synod of Elvira*, §5, and *The Synod of Ancyra*, §23, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, p. 140, and p. 221; and *Concilium Epaonense*, §31. While this last council states that it follows the decrees of Ancyra, it also enforces a two year excommunication for the killing of a slave.

penance for killing, the comparatively short period of one year demanded by the *Synodus I S. Patricii*, is ignored by later texts, but not forgotten.[172]

The British texts show no clear sense of diverging from the Continental custom of non-repeatable confession for the laity, a practice which is possibly hinted at in the *Synodus I S. Patricii* in the brevity of its penance for killing, and which appears to be accepted in the Penitentials themselves. It may have been the case that this innovation did arise in the British Church and was then transmitted to Ireland, or that it is the result of the synchronising of British and Irish religious customs in Ireland. The exact process of how or why repeatable confession and penance arose may never be clearly understood, but arise it did, as is illustrated in the first handbook on penance: the Penitential of Finnian.

[172] See below, p.164, n. 782.

Chapter 2: Continuity and Development in Irish Penitential Thought and the Nature of Bloodshed

2.1 Finnian's Penitential

The Penitential of Finnian, written in the sixth century,[173] is concerned primarily with the clergy and laity, but not monks, which may suggest that it is not simply an elaboration on a monastic rule, but rather a new composition for the specific purpose of 'curing' non-monastics of spiritual ills.[174] Bieler notes that the principle of curing contraries found in the work is reminiscent of Cassian.[175] The text exists in its complete, and oldest, form in only one manuscript, though large portions can be found in other documents.[176] The identity of the composer is unknown, though Kenney believed it to be either Finnian of Clonard (d. 549) or Finnian of Mag mBili (d. 579),[177] with McNeill and Gamer preferring the former.[178] Charles-Edwards holds the opposite position,[179] as does Ó Cróinín (though apparently with a certain hesitance).[180] Sharpe chooses ambivalence, referring to both figures as *Uinniau*, an 'unlocated sixth-century saint',[181] and Dumville expresses a similar reservation in assigning a specific historical identity to the figure in question.[182] Indeed, it has been suggested that the two Finnians were in fact one individual, a British missionary revered by two separate

[173] No specific date can be offered, other than that it was written before Columbanus' penitential, and, as such, Bieler suggests that it was composed before 591; Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 4. Note that Diagram 1 and Tables 1-2 may be a useful guide for this and the following chapters; see below, p. 234 and pp. 236-237.
[174] Bieler notes that the Penitential of Finnian does not draw on any known sources; Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 27. Kenney also remarks on its originality: see Kenney, *Sources*, p. 241.
[175] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 4.
[176] The complete text is found in Vienna, National Library, Lat. 2233 (Theol. Lat. 725), *c*.800 from Salzburg. For further details concerning the penitential manuscripts see Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 12-24.
[177] Kenney, *Sources*, p. 240, and AU 549.3 and 579.1. Mag mBili (modern Movilla, Co. Down) may have been the site of a pre-Christian cult, and the Finnian associated with the church there was a member of the Dál Fiatach, one of the three families from which the kings of the Ulaid were chosen, such that Mag mBili may have been the primary church of this kin-group. Indeed, Mag mBili appears to have had an active scholarly community throughout the early medieval period; see Ann Hamlin, 'The early church in County Down to the twelfth century', in Lindsay Proudfoot (ed.), *Down: History and Society* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 49-50.
[178] John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (eds. and trans.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a translation of the principal "libri poenitentiales" and selections from related documents* (New York, 1938; reprinted, 1990), p. 86.
[179] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Ulster, saints of (*act*. *c*.400 – *c*.600)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 55, p. 874.
[180] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: vol. I, Prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), p. 374.
[181] Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Columba* (London, 1995), p. 318.
[182] David N. Dumville, 'St Finnian of Movilla: Briton, Gael, or Ghost?', in Lindsay Proudfoot (ed.), *Down: History & Society* (Dublin, 1997), p. 78.

cults.[183] This presents the possibility that not only could the text have been composed at two different locations in Ireland, it may even have first been written in Britain.

Whether a product of Ireland or Britain, one must wonder at what would inspire the creation of such a novel document. Considering the times during which the two Finnians lived, it may have been the case that the author of the text was spurred on to commit his penitential teachings to parchment by one of the many 'mortalities' (*i.e.*, plagues) which afflicted Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries; Finnian, abbot of Clonard, would have survived the first recorded mortality only to die in the second, whereas Finnian, bishop of Mag mBili, may have lived through these two and a third.[184] What better motivation for the creation of a 'medical' handbook of the soul than apparent divine punishment of plague and the fear of dying suddenly with sins unrepented and unforgiven? It may even have been the case that such fatal events encouraged the expansion of the penitential system out from the monastery to the secular world: layfolk may have sought religious explanations and comforts during these 'mortalities', and the Irish Church may have either seen this as an opportunity to guide society or it was compelled to arrive at a new way of dealing with that society as a result of the demands placed upon it. Whatever the case may have been, the 'mortalities' may have played a role in the development of lay penance, but they do not offer any assistance in revealing who the innovator may have been.

Let us, for a moment, consider the career of Columbanus. Though a Leinsterman, he was taught at a daughter-house of Bangor, and later became a monk of Bangor itself, a monastery which lies a very short distance north of the monastery of Mag mBili.[185] Taking

---

[183] David N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Uinniau', in Michael Lapidge and David N. Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbrigde, 1984), pp. 207-208, and pp. 213-214. The ethnicity of Finnian has also been debated, that is whether he is Irish, Breton, or Briton, but it would appear the latter ascription appears to be the accepted position; for a linguistic discussion of the origins of the name, see Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Finnian or Winniau?', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa/Ireland and Europe: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter/The Early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 52-57, and Dumville, 'St Finnian of Movilla: Briton, Gael, or Ghost?', pp. 78-79.

[184] 'Mortalitas prima que dicitur blefed', AU 545.1; 'Mortalitas magna in qua isti pausant: Finnio maccu Telduib...', AU 549.3; and 'Mortalitas magna hoc anno...', AU 556.2. The first mortality roughly coincides with the Plague of Justinian (541-542), a plague which resurfaced periodically until the eighth century. After this last incidence, the Annals of Ulster do not record an outbreak of plague for another hundred years when in 665 a great mortality killed a high-king, Áed Sláine, and a king of the Airgialla, Máel Bressail, and his brother; 'Mortalitas magna. Diarmait m. Aedo Slane et Blaimac et Mael Bresail filii Maele Duin mortui sunt .i. don bhuidhe Chonaill', AU 665.1.

[185] Columbanus was first taught by Sinilis (perhaps Sinell son of Mianiach, abbot of Claen Inis in Lough Erne, or Sillán moccu Mind, abbot of Bangor), before being drawn to the monastic life at Bennchor (Bangor, Co. Down); see Jonas of Bobbio, *Vitae S. Columbani*, in Krusch, B. (ed.), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, MGH SRG (Hannover, 1905), pp. 157-158; Donald Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus',

into account the proximity of these two sites, and clear association between the Penitentials of Columbanus and of Finnian,[186] coupled the fact that Columbanus knew that Finnian was in contact with Gildas,[187] it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the great Irish missionary was either connected to a community which adhered to this penitential system, or, perhaps, was even acquainted with the author of the text.[188] Geographically, Mag mBili would suit, but we may posit the presence of the Penitential of Finnian at this monastery irrespective of the location of Finnian himself and the land of its composition.

The Penitential of Finnian begins by explaining that if a person sins 'by thought in his heart', yet immediately repents, seeks pardon from God, and makes satisfaction, they are forgiven.[189] If these evil thoughts are allowed to persist, the individual must pray and fast day and night until the evil thoughts are dispelled.[190] If the thought has not become deed through lack of opportunity, the sin is regarded to be the same as if the act had occurred, but the punishment is not the same; the sin has been committed in the heart, and with intention.[191] The punishment for this intended but uncompleted deed is half a year of penance, even for the thought of murder, with an allowance of bread and water, and the forgoing of wine and meat for a year.[192] From the beginning, a clear line is drawn between thought and deed, where the penance for the former is not as severe as that of the latter, unless it is a deed which was not completed through a lack of opportunity, in which case it is treated as being equal to the act of sinning. This is reiterated once more in the text with explicit reference to murder, confirming the previously mentioned punishment for a cleric, but adding that a layman need only suffer penance for seven days 'since he is a man of this world, his guilt is lighter in this world and his reward is less in the world to come'.[193] Presumably then, this is the punishment that a layman must undergo for all sins of the heart. It is interesting to note that a 'thought-crime', no matter how grave or minor it is, incurs the same tariff, so long as it is not

---

in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 4 and p. 7; and Rob Meens, 'Columbanus (d. 615), *OxDNB*, vol. 12, p. 811.

[186] This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

[187] Columbanus, *Epistula I*, in G. S. M. Walker (ed.), *Sancti Columbani opera* (Dublin, 1957), pp. 2-13; §7.

[188] Columbanus departed for the Continent in 590, only eleven years after the death of Finnian of Mag mBili in 579; see Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', p. 2, and pp. 10-11.

[189] *Pen. Vinn.*, §1. This stipulation appears to echo the Synod of Neocaesarea (314-325), which stated that a man who has sinned in thought does not have to undertake public penance; *Neocaesarae*, §4, Hefele, *Councils*, vol.1, p. 225. Though the two provisions are not precisely the same, the underlying sentiment appears to be that the thought of sin (so long as it is not consistently entertained) is not equivalent to the act of sinning.

[190] *Pen. Vinn.*, §2.

[191] *Ibid.*, §3.

[192] *Ibid.*

[193] '...si quis autem laicus fuerit ebdomadam dierum peniteat; quia homo seculi huius est, culpa leuior in hic mundo et premium minus in futuro', *ibid.*, §§6-7.

accompanied by action (or the will to complete it, yet without opportunity). All sins of the heart are equal in their intention, and therefore merit the same punishment, but the action of the crime demands a further penalty based on its severity.

For a cleric who strikes another and draws blood, the sin is equivalent to murder, but the punishment is not: deprived of his office, the cleric must do penance with an allowance of bread, water, and salt for a year, and he must weep and pray to God.[194] Again, the punishment for a layman is less: forty days penance and a fine paid to the injured party, the value of which is to be determined by a cleric or an arbiter.[195] A cleric is precluded from paying this fine.[196] It appears that the action of striking someone is understood to be an element in the intention of killing, as the crime is regarded as the same, but, once more, it is the degree to which the action was accomplished which determines the severity of the punishment.

The penance for a cleric who murders his neighbour is ten years exile, with seven years of this penance undertaken in another 'city', three years of which is suffered on bread and water, and the remainder while abstaining from meat and wine, and fasting during the forty-day periods.[197] After the ten years of exile, he is to return to his homeland and 'make satisfaction to the friends of him whom he slew, and compensate his father and mother', acting as a replacement for their dead son.[198] If these conditions are not fulfilled, the offending cleric will not be received back into the Church.[199] This system of exile and penance followed by reparations to the family of the dead echoes certain aspects of Adomnán of Iona's account of Librán of the reed-plot.[200] It would appear that penance and exile is the spiritual penalty for the sin of murder, while the compensation to the family is the terrestrial

[194] *Ibid*., §8.
[195] *Ibid*., §9.
[196] *Ibid*.
[197] '...et agat penitentiam vii annorum in alia urbe', *ibid*., §23. Bieler suggests that the *urbs* in question should be understood as an ecclesiastical, probably monastic, establishment, though he notes that Binchy has posited the influence of an Old Irish word, *orb(a)e*, which translates as 'patrimony, hereditary estate, territory, region'; see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 243, n. 9. Given the ecclesiastical context of the document and the exile, the former appears more likely. There is a discussion in this text concerning fornication and infanticide committed by clerics and women, *Pen. Vinn*., §§10-21; while the latter crime is, strictly speaking, murder, this thesis will focus primarily on violent bloodshed, which is to say homicide, either as murder or manslaughter, by accident, or in conflict as committed by and against adults, rather than infanticide.
[198] *Pen. Vinn*., §23.
[199] *Ibid*.
[200] Adomnán of Iona, *Vita S. Columbae*, A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (eds. and trans.), *Adomnán's 'Life of Columba'*, (Edinburgh, 1961; 2nd edn, Oxford, 1991), II §39. This episode will be discussed in greater detail later in the thesis.

restitution necessary for the act of the murder.[201] The material compensation of the family may be a separate issue from a legal perspective, satisfying the demands of native law rather than that of the Church. Curiously, we are not informed of the limits of this compensation to the family, which may be an indication that it was decided outside of the ecclesiastical system. Furthermore, the fact that the cleric is to undertake his penance in another 'city' would suggest the existence of a network of ecclesiastical centres which not only could accommodate penitents but also agreed upon the manner of such penance.

Allowing for cases of unpremeditated killing, the Penitential states that such a crime requires penance on bread and water for three years, followed by three more abstaining from meat and wine, all of which occurs in exile.[202] While exile is still demanded, it is for a substantially shorter period than for intentional murder, and there is no requirement for offering compensation to the family of the victim; perhaps as the crime was was considered to have been incited by the Devil,[203] and therefore without malice, no physical restitution may have been thought to be necessary.

Turning to the laity, the penitential states that, for the shedding of blood, the offender must undergo three years of penance, unarmed save for a staff, not live with his wife, and for the first year must fast on an allowance of bread, water, and salt.[204] After three years the layman must then donate 'property for the redemption of his soul and the fruit of his penance', and provide for 'a feast for the servants of God'.[205] Once the feast is concluded, so is his penance, and he may receive the sacrament and return to his wife.[206] This penance is, in terms of exile and fasting, substantially less than that for a cleric, probably due to the fact that the layman *homo seculi est*.[207] The financial requirement placed upon the layman is far greater than that which was demanded of a clergyman, which may be due to simple fact that clerics would not have such wealth to dispose of, but a lay individual would. Perhaps it was deemed that, because the layman is of the world, so too must his restitution be tangible,

[201] There appear to have been two types of fines payable to the victim's kin: the *cró* or *éraic*, a fixed penalty of 7 *cumal*s for the homicide of any freeman, and the *lóg n-enech* which is based on the honour-price of the victim's kin; see Kelly, *Law*, p. 126.
[202] *Pen. Vinn.*, §24.
[203] '...sed instincto diabuli per obreptione', *ibid*.
[204] *Ibid.*, §35.
[205] '...post penitentiam trium annorum det pecunia<m> pro redemptionem anime sue et fructum penitentie in manu[s] sacerdotis et cenam faciat seruis Dei et in cena consummabitur et recipietur ad communionem...', *ibid.* A term of three years for killing is also found in *Sinodus Luci*, §2 and *Dauid*, §11, which may be indicative of the Penitential of Finnian drawing directly on precedents set by the British Church.
[206] *Pen. Vinn.*, §35.
[207] *Ibid.*, §7.

which is to say, a member of the clergy would fully understand the spiritual burden of penance, and therefore receive its full benefit, whereas it may have been believed that a layman would not understand such complexities, but would grasp the stinging lesson of economic hardship. This financial cost, along with the donation of money and the 'fruits of penance' into the hands of a priest, might have been understood to be alms, which would also act as a remission for sin. These 'fruits of penance' may also be an indication that the layman was supposed to undertake some form of physical labour as part of his penitential process, which is rendered into the hands of his confessor. Another possibility is that this 'feast for the servants of God' is connected to the *cena domini* and the reconciliation of penitents on Holy Thursday, and the return of the layman, now free from sin, to the altar on Easter Sunday.[208]

Unlike with the clergyman, there is no apparent distinction applied to the layman between wilful murder and non-premeditated killing, or even striking violently without killing; we are simply informed of the punishment for the shedding of blood. Perhaps here again there was the presumption that, since the layman was of the world, bloodshed and violence were simply an aspect of his daily life, coupled with his lack of spiritual learning and his smaller reward in the afterlife, there was no need for varying the penance, as the layman would not have understood what the subtle gradations would have meant; a simple 'catch-all' penance would suffice. No reference is made to the family of the victim, as in the situation with the cleric, which may lead us to presume that the secular liabilities of the layman were decided independently of the Church. The prohibition against the penitent layman carrying arms is not explicitly stated to end when the term of penance is complete, but it would seem that this stipulation is part of the penitential act, and not a long-term ban on the use of weapons; this demand is set in sequence between the length of the penance and the proscription from living with the wife, both of which are fixed in term.

It is also interesting to note that it would appear that priests are the primary ecclesiastical officers in charge of penitential matters in this text. Where decisions on penitential matters are concerned (duration, reconciliation, etc.) we do not find a bishop as

[208] Holy Thursday was the ritually appointed day for the reconciliation of penitents in late fourth-century Milan, a custom which was apparently popular in Merovingian Gaul and is attested in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary of the mid-eighth century; Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, p. 23, and pp. 29-30. Considering the numerous connections between the Churches of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland (not least of which were the various foundations of Columbanus), it does not seem implausible that such a custom would be transmitted to the Irish. As possible evidence of this, Adomnán notes Columba's specific reference to the reconciliation of a penitent on Easter Sunday; *VC*, II 39.

the figure of authority, but a *sacerdos*.[209] On only one occasion we are informed that the decision to reconcile a penitent cleric lies in the hands of a bishop or priest, but there is no indication that one is preferred over the other; it is the construction of this penitential demand which suggests that *sacerdos* is not synonymous with 'bishop'.[210] This stands in contrast to *Synodus I S. Patricii* where the term appears to apply to the episcopal grade.[211] Finnian seems to expect that penance would be undertaken under the supervision of an abbot or priest, not a bishop.[212] This was not the accepted practice on the Continent.[213] What occurred within the Irish Church to allow the appropriation of this right from the bishop to the priest from the time of Patrick and Palladius to that of Finnian? Were there too few bishops and too many penitents? Had necessity out-weighed tradition, such that priests were allowed to administer penance, and that a monastically trained clergy deferred to the authority of an abbot rather than a bishop? Or perhaps it was a matter of practicality, such that if the laity were expected to confine themselves from their spouses for a fixed period, where better to do so than at a monastery, supervised therein by a monastic clergy and the abbot? Considering the evidence of the *Synodus I S. Patricii*, there may have been regional variations in the understanding of what grade the term *sacerdos* referred to. To add to this hazy relationship, the early medieval Irish appear to have obscured the distinction between 'abbot' as the senior official in charge of a monastery and the head of an independent church,[214] which may have made an abbot, in certain circumstances, the hierarchical equivalent of a priest or even a bishop. Perhaps this ambiguity is simply a consequence of the Penitential of Finnian having been written from a more monastically inclined perspective for the laity and clergy,[215] an example of the surviving evidence skewing our perception of a practice. The answer to these questions remains obscure, but if it was the case that, in the Irish Church, priests and abbots were permitted to oversee and reconcile lay penitents, the Penitential of Finnian offers us not only the first attempt to produce a systematic account of sins and their remedies, or the opening of

[209] *Pen. Vinn*., §9, §12, §23, §35, and §36.
[210] '...et ita iudicio episcopi uel sacerdotis suo officio restituatur', *ibid*., §12.
[211] *Synodus Pat*., §6 and §14. See n. 166 for an exploration of this term in the context of the *Synodus I S. Patricii*.
[212] *Pen. Vinn*., §23.
[213] See n. 169 above for a list of synodal decrees concerning a bishop as the sole authority in imposing penance. Of the four British texts, the *Praefatio Gildae* makes specific reference to the abbot of a monastery as being the judge of penitential matters, which is not surprising considering the fact that this text is focused on those who have taken monastic vows; see *Praefatio Gildae*, §4, §12, and §18.
[214] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 225.
[215] Mag mBili is recorded as having both an abbot and a bishop in the generation after Finnian, which might imply that it did so during his own lifetime; AU 603.4 and 619.2. Equally, a similar situation seems to have existed at Clonard, and at one point it is recorded that its abbot (Oiséne) and bishop (Colmán) died in the same year, the latter having also formerly held the office of abbot at that same site; AU 654.2.

repeatable, privately confessed monastic-style penance to the laity, but also a hint that the very structure of confession was changing, moving from an episcopal responsibility to, perhaps, the parochial and monastic, which may itself be evidence of an attempt to expand confession into the broader secular world.

2.2 The *Ambrosianum*

The anonymous *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*, though long claimed to be an early medieval Irish penitential handbook,[216] has only recently been the subject of a detailed study which has confirmed its Insular origins and dated it *c.* 550 to *c.* 650.[217] Though it cannot be claimed with any certainty to be a product of the early medieval Irish Church, it was known to Cummian and the foundations of Columbanus on the Continent.[218] In this light, it may be, like Finnian's Penitential, British in origin and transported to Ireland, the work of a Briton in Ireland, or of a well-informed Irishman working from British sources depending on one's perspective.[219] Whatever the case may be, this anonymous penitential and that of Finnian were foundational to Cummian's, and it reflects a growing complexity in the understanding of penance in the Insular Church. It bears clearer traces of Cassian in comparison to Finnian, the first penitential to categorise sins along his familiar lines, though with some alterations.

---

[216] The text was originally edited, and identified as Irish, by Otto Seebass in the closing years of the nineteenth century, but it was not included by Ludwig Bieler in his 1963 collection of Irish penitential texts; for a brief overview of this issue see Meens, 'The historiography of early medieval penance', in Abigail Firey (ed.), *A New History of Penance* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 82-83. The document was 're-discovered' in the closing decade of the twentieth century by Ludger Körntgen, who produced a new edition of the text with a detailed investigation of its origins, construction, and place within the penitential genre, and it is this edition which serves as the basis for the present examination; *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*, Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 258-270.

[217] Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, p. 86. This penitential does not appear in either Kenney, *Sources* or Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400-1200* (Dublin, 1985).

[218] Körntgen provides a detailed comparison of the *Ambrosianum* and the Penitential of Cummian, and notes the former's relationship to the *Regula coenobialis* of Columbanus; Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, pp. 13-35 and pp. 58-60. It is also worth noting that the manuscript containing this text is a product of Bobbio, a Columbanian foundation; *ibid*., pp. 9-11.

[219] Finnian, Cummian, and the *Ambrosianum* all make use of the four short British penitential texts noted previously, and, leaving aside issues of transmission and editorial caprice, one might offer a tentative relative chronology of these works: the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* is explicitly used in the *Ambrosianum* and implicitly by Cummian, and conveys the same teaching on non-premeditated killing as Finnian; the *Ambrosianum* draws on the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* (which also carries a similar sense of lay murder as Finnian) and the *Praefatio Gildae*, while only Cummian employs the *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae* (though he does appear to use the *Praefatio Gildae* and the *Sinodus Luci* independently of his precursors). It may then be the case that the *Paen. Vinn.*, *Dauid*, and *Sinodus Luci* are all broadly contemporary, followed by the *Praefatio Gildae*, the *Paen. Amb.*, the *Sinodus Aq*., and, finally, *Paen. Cumm.*, which proves to be the foundation for the next phase of Irish penitentials.

Curiously, the *Ambrosianum* offers two sections on the sin of homicide. The first, helpfully entitled *De homicidiis*, appears in the chapter *De fornicatione*, and the second under *De ira*. Part of *De homicidiis* is drawn from the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis*, though a substantial element is without parallel;[220] its insertion under *De fornicatione* is presumably due to the fact that these two sins were, along with apostasy, the gravest crimes a Christian could commit, and were often equated with one another. In keeping with the *Excerpta*, a bishop who wilfully commits homicide, *uoluntate homicidium fecerit*, or adultery must undertake thirteen years of penance, a presbyter seven, a deacon six, and monk not in orders four.[221] Interestingly, the *Ambrosianum* does not appear to carry forward the three year penance for homicide by a layman noted in the *Excerpta*. Instead, it determines that a man who commits homicide with malice aforethought is to be denounced unless he repents, surrenders his arms until death, and submits to the judgement of a priest.[222] This curious contradiction in terms of penance for wilful homicides may be a result of the insertion of *De homicidiis* into the Penitential at a later point, as it seems rather odd to impose a harsher penance on a layman than on a member of the religious community. That said, it is clear that the *Ambrosianum* must have the laity in mind in these penances for killing, not only because it has already discussed clerical homicide under *De homicidiis*, but as it demands that the perpetrator of a premeditated killing must surrender his arms, instruments of violence which a clergyman is unlikely to have.

One who kills in a fit of rage without premeditation is also condemned unless he undertakes three years' penance on bread and water with alms and prayers to God.[223] This ruling is concluded with a statement that, if the offender has taken a vow of perfection, the findings of the *sinodum Victoriae* apply.[224] This explicit reference to the *Sinodus Luci Victorie*, confirmed by the simple fact that the penance for killing in anger is directly taken from its decrees,[225] is one of the key pieces of evidence in support of the Insular origins of the *Ambrosianum*. That said, this statement in the Penitential creates a certain quandary as it seems to suggest that the noted penance is for one who has not taken a vow, and that a

[220] Compare *Dauid*, §7 and *Paen. Amb., De homicidiis*, II §6. Note that the entirety of *De homicidiis* is found at *Paen. Amb.*, II §6, embedded in *Paen. Amb.*, II *De fornicatione*; for the sake of clarity, I will include the title *De homicidiis* in all references to this specific section. See also, Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, pp. 25-26.
[221] *Paen. Amb., De homicidiis*, II §6.
[222] 'Qui homicidium odii meditatione per insidias fecerit, dampnetur, nisi reictis armis usque ad mortem...', *ibid.*, IV §3.
[223] *Ibid.*, IV §4.
[224] *Ibid.*
[225] Compare *Sinodus Luci*, §2 and *Paen. Amb.*, IV §4.

confessor should consult the synodal decrees for one who has,[226] but the decisions of the synod describe the exact opposite situation, that the penance in question is, in fact, for one who has taken a vow of perfection.[227] The concluding remarks in the decrees of this synod state that an unspecified reduction ought to be made for one who has not taken a vow.[228] Considering the fact that it does not mirror the wording of the synod, it merely carries the sense of its findings, it may have been the case that the compiler of the *Ambrosianum* did not have the text of the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* before him,[229] but rather that its precepts had been garbled in transmission to him, or that, by the time of writing, the obligations of penance imposed on the laity had been increased.

If a man kills his neighbour accidentally and seeks refuge in a 'priestly/episcopal city', he must undertake a year and a half of penance, fasting, and prayer, after which time he is released 'from death' and is allowed to receive communion.[230] This is the first Insular example of the nuance of accidental killing, and it is interesting to note that the author of this penitential seems to expect that the offender would flee to a holy site for sanctuary, something not noted in the other forms of killing described. The creation of a new penance for killing by accident may be indicative of an on-going debate within the Insular Church over the culpability of the individual for certain crimes. Perhaps this was due to the influence of Irish secular law,[231] but it may simply have been a development in the understanding of sin and punishment itself within the Insular Church, either as an aspect of compassion or reasoned nuance; if an unpremeditated killing was not truly the fault of the attacker, but at the behest of the Devil,[232] then how could an accidental killing merit punishment equal to that of unpremeditated or premeditated killing? Intention had become an important factor: the premeditated murder shows clear, planned intention, and unpremeditated killing indicates an intention to kill in perhaps an extreme situation where one might not otherwise resort to such violence, but, with an accidental killing, death was at no point intended.

---

[226] 'Si uero post uota perfectionis, iuxta sinodum Victoriae', *Paen. Amb.*, IV §4.
[227] *Sinodus Luci*, §9.
[228] *Ibid*.
[229] *Paen. Amb.*, IV §4 is the only section which bears any resemblance to *Sinodus Luci Victorie*, a text which is employed in several sections of the *Paen. Cumm.*; compare *Paen. Cumm.*, II §7, III §1 and §§8-11, IV §7 (= *Paen. Amb.* IV §4), IX §13, and *Sinodus Luci*, §6, §1, §5, §2 and §4 respectively.
[230] 'Si autem casu nolens occiderit proximum suum, ad iudicium sacerdotis poeniteat, ut urbem sacerdotalem confugiat et annum et dimidium poenitentiae ieiunio et orationibus acceptum expleat, donec morte magni sacerdotis per communionem altaris liberetur', *Paen. Amb.*, IV §5.
[231] For a discussion of legal and illegal forms of killing, the punishments involved, and payments demanded for inflicting injury by secular authorities, see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 124-134.
[232] It appears that Finnian, at least, believed that killing suddenly, and not from hatred, was prompted by the Devil, *Pen. Vinn.*, §24.

For maiming or incapacitating a man in a quarrel, it is decided that the offender will pay the injured party's medical fee and for the cost of the deformity, do his work until he is healed, and undertake half a year of penance.[233] If he cannot make such restitution, he must undertake a year of penance with bread and water at the judgement of a priest.[234] He who strikes another without incapacitating them must make satisfaction to the victim and undergo one or two forty-day periods of penance with bread and water at the judgement of a priest.[235] This is a far more complicated system than that proposed by Finnian, and may be indicative of the influences of Irish secular law on Church practices.[236] Finnian may not have been entirely familiar with the native legal system, or was uncomfortable aligning it with Church practices, offering only a minor recognition in the form of a fine decided by an arbiter, but at some point between him and his penitential successors the Irish Church did adjust its values to allow for the adoption of certain indigenous customs which were in keeping with ecclesiastical conventions, which may be first demonstrated here in the *Ambrosianum*.

The *Ambrosianum* also decrees that one who hates his brother in his heart is guilty of homicide.[237] The guilty party, if he does not confess his hatred to his brother and persists in his evil thoughts, is to pray before his priest and, if healthy, survive on bread and water,[238] presumably until his hatred is overcome. It might first be thought that a monastic setting is implied in this penance, but, in light of the fact that it is immediately followed by the penance which demands that a premeditated killer surrender his arms, it does not seem implausible that the laity could also submit to this penitential demand. Though this sin has biblical precedent (1 John 3:15 and Leviticus 19:17), in terms of penance, the premise is similar to a ruling in the *Praefatio Gildae*, but the punishment is different. In the *Praefatio*, it is stated that wrath breeds murder, and that one who persists in holding anger in his heart lives in death; confessing his sin, the guilty party must undertake a forty-day fast, double that if the sinful thought endures, and if he repeats the sin he is to be cut off from the community (note

[233] *Paen. Amb.*, IV §6.
[234] *Ibid.*
[235] *Ibid.*, §7.
[236] Secular Irish law had a complicated way of dealing with the compensation of injury. In brief, fines for injury were to be paid after the examination of the injured party by a judge, and the offender had to become a substitute labourer for the normal work of the injured individual. The offender also had to make guarantees to the injured party's family that he would fulfil his obligations. If the injured person died, the offender had to pay the full fine for murder; if they recovered, a fine was paid for any enduring blemish; see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 129-134.
[237] *Paen. Amb.*, IV §2.
[238] 'Quanto autem odium non reppulit, tanto in pane et aqua, si ualet, uiuat, ut oret pro illo sacerdos ad dominum', *ibid.*

that the *Praefatio* is concerned with the clergy and monks, not the laity).[239] Indeed, as noted above, Finnian also offers a penance for a sinful thought of an act uncompleted: half a year for a cleric or seven days for a layman. This is not to suggest that one is borrowing from the other (the language, terms of penance, and religious status of the penitent individual in question are not comparable), but rather that the similarities demonstrate that there was a sense in the Insular Churches that the thought of a sin was equivalent to its action, but that the correction of thought and deed merited different methods of reparation.

Not unlike the Penitential of Finnian, these penances are judged by a *sacerdos*; indeed variations of the formula *ad iudicium sacerdotis secundum legem poeniteat* are used throughout the text.[240] One might first render this as 'let him do penance by the judgement of a priest according to the law', but this raises some interesting possibilities. It might be initially assumed that *sacerdos* encompasses both 'priest' and 'bishop' in its meaning, such that, as one might expect from the traditional system of penance, a bishop is presumed to be the authority administering penance in this text. Though they are not conclusive, two pieces of evidence count against this. First of all, the title of *episcopus* is known and is employed twice: once in terms of a bishop's own sinful acts,[241] and again as the judge of one who falls into heresy.[242] Nevertheless, *sacerdos* could yet carry the sense of including the episcopal rank. Secondly, the text refers to a penitent being freed from their penance by a *magni sacerdotis* who resides in an *urbem sacerdotalem*;[243] this curious terminology must refer to an episcopal church and its bishop. The fact that the penitent in question has already consulted with a *sacerdos* concerning his penance before seeking refuge with a *magnus sacerdos* in the *urbem sacerdotalem* demonstrates that priests were the ones hearing confession, and that certain cases could be referred up the chain of command.[244] It may have been the case that one who had killed by accident might have sought the protection of the Church from violent retaliation of the victim's family, though one might then wonder why the cases of premeditated and non-premeditated homicides make no mention of a 'great priest' releasing them from their penance. Perhaps it was the case that, for these latter two

[239] 'Nam qui iram corde multo tempore retinet, in morte est... et si idem fecerit, abscidatur a corpore sicut membrum putredum, quia furor homicidium nutrit', *Praefatio Gildae*, §§17-18.
[240] For example, see *Paen. Amb.*, *De ebrietate*, I §2, §§4-6; *De fornicatione*, II §§2-3, §5, (*De homicidiis*) §6, §7, §10; and *De ira*, IV §§3-7. The cited example is taken from IV §3.
[241] *Ibid.*, *De homicidiis*, II §6.
[242] *Ibid.*, *De cenodoxia*, VII §4.
[243] *Ibid.*, *De ira*, IV §5.
[244] 'Si autem casu nolens occiderit proximum suum, ad iudicium sacerdotis poeniteat, ut urbem sacerdotalem confugiat... donec morte magni sacerdotis per communionem altaris liberetur', *Paen. Amb.*, IV §5.

forms of killing, the situation was rather clear-cut, but that with accidental killing there was a certain ambiguity which required the involvement of higher authorities. One might also argue that all references in this text to a *sacerdos* imply such a *magnus sacerdos*, but why then make such a specification only once? This would suggest that the compiler of this document expected that penance was endured under episcopal jurisdiction, but that much of the practical responsibilities had been farmed out to local clergy, who would then refer more difficult matters to their superiors, a point which may in turn buttress the notion expressed above that Finnian too expected the lower clergy to administer penance. That said, not all bishops were of the same rank,[245] and so, perhaps, this text is advocating that one of a lower rank consult his superior in the matter of a new category of sin which may have been difficult to judge. These clergymen were, presumably, equipped with penitential handbooks, hence the existence of the Penitential itself and the repeated reference to 'the judgement of priests according *to the law*'.

The *Ambrosianum* provides a set of interesting possibilities. It may be the case that it precedes Finnian and that its relative complexity is a result of its origins in a more developed ecclesiastical landscape (perhaps in the east of Ireland, as with the *Synodus I S. Patricii*, or in western Britain, which could still produce figures like Gildas in the sixth century in spite of the Anglo-Saxon conquest of the more cultivated and richer southern lowlands and eastern shores),[246] but, on balance, the evidence would suggest that the two Penitentials are either contemporaneous or that the *Ambrosianum* is later development. In the first place, Finnian and the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis* both carry a penance of three years for a layman who kills; neither text appears to be borrowing from the other, so it may have been the case that these documents represent two separate reports of a commonly held position in the Insular Church; the *Ambrosianum* advises a state of permanent penance for the sin of intentional

[245] The complicated ranking of kingship in Ireland appears to have been mirrored in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; just as there were 'kings of kings' there were 'bishops of bishops'. Seniority in the Irish Church was also not always based on clerical rank, such that an abbot of an ancient or especially important church or monastery could be considered equal in status to a 'noble bishop'; see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 126-127 and pp. 132-133.

[246] One purely hypothetical scenario may have been as follows: Gildas notes that he was living during an age of peace between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons after the battle of *Mons Badonicus*, a period which may have seen renewed investment in the British Church by British kings seeking to assure the favour of God and their own position in society. Such a peace after a period of invasion and warfare may have had spiritual ramifications, leading to the emergence of a more devout cohort among the laity thankful of their deliverance from destruction, a laity who perhaps sought the succour of penance in a Church willing to provide it. The peace between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons was not to last, and hostilities erupted again from the mid-sixth century onwards, which may have prompted the desire to commit penitential teachings to writing for fear of their loss, hence the *Ambrosianum*; see Gildas, *Liber querulous de excidio Britanniae*, in Michael Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britian and other works* (London, 1978), §26.

murder. Finnian also appears to echo the penitential demand of the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* for killing without malice aforethought by a member of the clergy, and though again there is no clear connection between the language of the two texts, it can be hypothesised that Finnian was aware of this synodal precept; the *Ambrosianum* extends this consideration to include the laity. The *Ambrosianum* makes no reference to Finnian (nor, indeed, vice versa), which might suggest that its compiler was unaware of the first Penitential, though the very fact of its existence would suggest otherwise, which is to say, it seems highly unlikely that two Insular authors would independently invent the penitential handbook, such that one must have been aware of the other. That the handbooks of penance would move from a position of complexity to simplicity also stands against the likelihood of the priority of the *Ambrosianum*. It may have been the case that the author of the *Ambrosianum* was indeed aware of Finnian's handbook, but thought it lacking in some respects, and so set out to develop a more rigorous and thorough system, explicitly drawing on biblical and ecclesiastical precedents. Finally, there is also the sense that Finnian is writing as an individual, acting as the leader of a religious centre, whereas the author of the *Ambrosianum* is writing at the behest of his 'brothers' and is not himself a figure of authority, rather working under the command of others. Such a difference in motivation might suggest that he was set the task of writing a penitential by those who were aware of Finnian's novel creation but wished for something more suited to their pastoral concerns; indeed, the very fact that the *Ambrosianum* makes reference a specific synod may be evidence of its author having been set the task of compiling a penitential based on established consensus, and not on the individual wisdom of an esteemed holyman, as with Finnian. If the document can indeed be considered to be Irish in origin, it is tempting to place it in the era of the synod of Mag Léne (629/630) and the resulting expedition to Rome which must have returned with a bounty of new religious materials, though it could be placed earlier, a consequence of the Augustinian mission to Britain in 597 and the plausible resultant stimulation of the British Church in response to the new Anglo-Saxon Church; with an anonymous text with no internal dating criteria such as this, possibilities abound.

2.3 The Penitential of Columbanus

In contrast to the ambiguity of the authorship of the first two Insular Penitentials, in the case of the third there is a refreshing degree of certainty. Though born in Leinster,[247] Columbanus left his homeland as a young adult and was first tutored by Sinilis in Ulster,[248] before moving to the monastery of Bennchor (Bangor, Co. Down).[249] Bennchor had been recently founded by Comgall in the lands of the Cruithni,[250] not far from Finnian's monastery in Mag mBili in the kingdom of the Dál Fiatach.[251] Once he had completed his education, Columbanus left Ireland on a self-imposed exile, travelling to Merovingian Gaul,[252] where he proceeded to establish the monasteries of Annegray, Luxeuil, and Fontaines,[253] eventually earning the ire of certain Frankish bishops and royals,[254] which led (with various detours) to his ultimate relocation to Lombard Italy,[255] where he ended his days at his foundation at Bobbio.[256] It would seem most likely that Columbanus began composing his penitential, based on a familiar precursor, during the rapid expansion of his foundations in Burgundy as a means of effectively governing three establishments – he could not be everywhere at once, and some sins would have demanded immediate correction.

---

[247] The *Vita* of Columbanus was begun not long after his death by Jonas, who entered Bobbio in 618. Jonas, more concerned with his subject's later life as a missionary in Continental Europe, provides us with no information on Columbanus' ancestry, parentage, date of birth, or even any hint as to how old he was at the time of his death. We are told only that he was born in Leinster and that he entered a monastery as a young adult, where he remained for 'many years'; see Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', pp. 1-2, and Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 3, pp. 155-158. From the few hints offered, it has been suggested that Columbanus was born around the mid-sixth century to a landowning family that did not belong to the higher ranks, and who may have been first generation Christians; see Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', p. 3.

[248] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 3, p. 157. This Sinilis is regarded as being identical with Mo Sinu maccu Min of Crannach at Downpatrick, fourth abbot of Bangor, who died in 610; Mo Sinu is said to have been the first of the Irish to learn the complex skill of computus by heart; see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Mo Sinu maccu Min and the computus at Bangor', in *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp. 282-286.

[249] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 4, p. 158. Comgall mac Sétnai (511/16-602), founder of Bangor, belonged to the Dál nAraidi, and is associated by Adomnán with the Cruithni; see *VC*, I 49, and III 17.

[250] Bennchor was founded in the late sixth century; see AU 555.3 and 559.1

[251] Kenney, *Sources*, p. 390.

[252] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 5, pp, 161-162. Columbanus probably arrived in Gaul 590x591; see Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', p. 10.

[253] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 6, p. 163, and I 10, pp. 169-170.

[254] Columbanus was expelled from the kingdom of Burgundy twenty years after his arrival due to a conflict with Queen Brunechildis (he had refused to bless the illegitimate children of her son, King Theuderic II), losing him the royal patronage that had supported his alien observances against the plaintive cries of the bishops of Gaul (he was called to defend himself and his practices at the council of Chalon-sur-Saône, 603); see Jonas, I 18-20, pp. 186-197, and Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', pp. 10-15.

[255] Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I 30, p. 220.

[256] It is recorded that Columbanus died nine days before the calends of December, but no mention is made of the year; Jonas, I 30, pp. 223-224. His death has been accepted as having occurred on 23 November 615; see Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', p. 27.

The structure of the Penitential of Columbanus explicitly encompasses three categories of Christians: monks, clergy, and laity.[257] While their sins may have been the same, the penances demanded of each group vary, presumably due to the same reason that Finnian did not levy the same penances on the laity as on the clergy – that they are 'of the world' and, consequently, their reward will be less in heaven. Charles-Edwards regards the text as a composite begun in the late sixth century, perhaps in Ireland, drawing on Finnian and the British texts, with extensive additions being made during the seventh century on the Continent.[258] Bieler notes that, like Finnian, Columbanus knows and endorses Cassian,[259] but his awareness of the *Ambrosianum* is unclear as there is no trace of it in his Penitential, though may have been employed in his Rule.[260] Describing the Penitential of Columbanus as the last of the 'particular' penitential documents (which is to say, penances directed at specific groups) that were influenced largely by the British Church before the advent of the 'comprehensive' penitential (a systematic penitential for the whole Church based on Cassian's eight vices),[261] Charles-Edwards also argues that this work illustrates that the 'moral gulf' between the laity and clergy had narrowed since the time of Finnian's Penitential, and that this work is in some way an anticipation of the inclusive design of Cummian.[262]

---

[257] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 5, in reference to *Paen. Columb.*, A §§2-12, B §§26-30 (monks), B §§1-12 (the clergy), and B §§13-25 (the laity), pp. 96-107. Charles-Edwards states that this is the first example of a penitential text including all three categories as the four British texts discuss only monks and the clergy, and Finnian only the clergy and the laity; see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 218. I have suggested previously that *Sinodus Luci Victorie* and *Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis* appear to apply to the clergy and the laity; see above, pp. 36- 37. While the former does note that the penances it sets out apply to one who has made a vow of perfection, a reduction is applied to one who has not taken the vow, which may imply that such penances were open to the laity; *Sinodus Luci*, §9. The latter, contrary to Charles-Edward's argument, not only makes provision for monks, it also explicitly includes laymen among those who must suffer penance for capital crimes; *Dauid*, §10 and §11.

[258] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', pp. 235-236.

[259] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 5.

[260] While not bearing a direct influence on his Penitential, the *Ambrosianum* may have been the source of a section of Columbanus' *Regula coenobialis*; see Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, pp. 19-22. This may be indicative of continued contact between Columbanus or his foundations and Ireland after his departure. Indeed, it is at his final establishment, Bobbio, that the surviving manuscript of the *Ambrosianum* was drawn up; *ibid*., pp. 9-13.

[261] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', pp. 217-218. Though Charles-Edwards divides the text into five sections, they do not differ in any great detail from Bieler's partitions and encompass the same three classes of people. It should be noted that Charles-Edwards states that the 'comprehensive' system was inherently Irish and devised by Cummian. As has been argued previously, the *Ambrosianum* demonstrates that the latter, and perhaps the former, point is not in fact the case.

[262] *Ibid*., p. 238. Despite the existence of the *Ambrosianum*, aspects of this argument still stand, as the anonymous Penitential partitions clerical and lay killing, and, instead of there being a great leap forward from Finnian to Cummian, this third text offers a sense of transformation or transition, though it is not directly related to its spiritual precursor.

The text is divided into two sections, conventionally known as A and B: the former appears to apply exclusively to monks, while the latter discusses monks, clergy, and laity.[263] This, and the fact that the quality of the Latin in section A is lower than that of section B, has led to the suggestion that A was unlikely to have been written by the wandering Irishman, and was probably conceived prior to 591 (the year of his departure from Ireland).[264] Consequently, B was composed by, or at the behest of, Columbanus while on the Continent.[265] The whole document draws heavily on Finnian's Penitential and on three of the four British texts (there would appear to be no trace of the *Synodus Luci Victoriae*).[266]

While this particular penitential may have come into being while Columbanus was on the Continent, and was probably not enforced in Ireland, it is the first tangible indication of the fact that Finnian's Penitential was not simply a local phenomenon confined to his own monastery, but one that was employed, at the very least, by Bangor, if not throughout the whole *familia* of Comgell.[267] One might even imagine that Columbanus' monasteries, maintaining contact with their spiritual homeland, transmitted some of the teachings of this penitential back to Ireland, influencing the penitential debate among the Irish Churches, though this seems unlikely considering the dominance of the *Ambrosianum*-type of penitentials carried forward by Cummian and his successors in the genre, and the lack of any apparent borrowing from this superseded model of penance in Ireland. Considering the possibility that part of the Penitential of Columbanus may have already existed in a nascent form at Bangor, based on Finnian but with influences from some of the previously noted British texts and other amendments not found in the first penitential, it would appear that

[263] *Paen. Columb.*, A §§1-12 and B §§1-30.
[264] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', p. 236.
[265] *Ibid*.
[266] See Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 285-286 for concordances between the various texts. While Bieler notes no concordances between Finnian and the British texts, there are some notable echoes, as I have argued previously. The first evidence of a three year term of penance for unpremeditated murder by a non-layman is found in the *Sinodus Luci*, §2, a period which we also find, with a certain degree of elaboration, in *Pen. Vinn.*, §24. This sin does not appear in the *Paen. Columb.*, but it is found in the *Paen. Cumm.* at IV §7. Did Columbanus simply choose to ignore this penance, did it not become accepted practice until Cummian's time, or had the version of Finnian's Penitential which has come down to us been amended to include new decrees from a British synod after Columbanus had already left for Gaul? The demand of three years penance for the sin of murder by a layman first appears in *Dauid*, §11, repeated in *Pen. Vinn.*, §35 and *Paen. Columb.*, B §13, though it is not found in *Paen. Cumm.* which instead conforms to the *Ambrosianum* for this crime.
[267] The *familia* of Comgell included Óentreb (Antrim), Mag Line, and Cambus (Camus) in the territories of the Ulaid, Ard Crema in Wexford, and Apor Crosan (Applecross) in Wester Ross; see Charles-Edwards, 'Ulster, saints of (act. *c*.400-*c*.500)', pp. 873-874. Note that Comgell is said to have died in the fiftieth year of his abbacy of Bangor in 602, and seventy years later Máel Rubani would establish the dependent house of Apor Crosan in Britian; see AU 602.1 and 673.5. Considering the evidence of Columbanus, it does not seem unlikely that Máel Rubani too brought a penitential with him to his new foundation which would have been based on Finnian.

religious leaders were free to alter the text as they saw fit; Finnian himself advocated such an approach in the conclusion of his own work.[268] At the very least, Columbanus demonstrates that, by the late-sixth century, Finnian's Penitential, with some amendments, was being consulted by two, if not more, foundations in Ireland.

As noted previously, this penitential is divided between penances for monks and penances for the whole Christian community. When we first encounter a penance for killing it is in reference to a monk who has committed murder, who must undertake a penance of ten years.[269] If a monk had only thought of killing a man, he was to suffer penance for half a year.[270] No provision is made for the sinful thoughts of a cleric in this regard, but, for the deed itself, he was be expected to undertake the same term of penance as the murderous monk, with the additional stipulation of being exiled for the duration of the penitential period.[271] It is also explicitly stated that the cleric must perform his penance on bread and water.[272] After this decade of exile, and having secured the favourable testimony of the bishop or priest who oversaw the penance of the offender, the cleric must return to his homeland and satisfy the demands of the slain individual's relatives; if he does not do this, he is to be regarded as a fugitive, and is not to be restored to his native land.[273] If it is a layman who has committed murder, the penance is for three years, suffered on bread and water and with the addition of unarmed exile, after which time he must return and satisfy the requirements of the family of the slain.[274] Only after fulfilling these requirements may he be restored to the altar.[275] A cleric who sheds blood in a brawl must do penance for one year, and a layman for forty days,[276] an injunction which is elaborated later in the text, where we are informed that if a layman has injured another through bloodshed, he must compensate the

[268] *Pen. Vinn., post scriptum.* With Finnian's final words in mind, it does not seem implausible that Columbanus was not working from Finnian's Penitential, but an amended version, perhaps a lost Penitential of Comgell.
[269] '... si homicidium aut sodomiticum fecerit peccatum, .x. annis paeniteat...', *Paen. Columb.*, A §3.
[270] 'Si quis igitur per cogitationem peccauerit, id est concupierit hominem occidere aut fornicari... maiora demedio anno... paeniteat', *ibid*., A §2.
[271] 'Si quis clericus homicidium fecerit et proximum suum occiderit, x annis exul paeniteat...', *ibid.*, B §1.
[272] '...testimonio conprobatus episcopi uel sacerdotis cum quo paenituit et cui conmissus fuit...', *ibid*.
[273] *Ibid*. It is interesting to note it is the testimony of *abbatis siue sacerdotis*, and not *episcopi uel sacerdotis*, that is stipulated in the equivalent passage in the *Pen. Vinn.*, §23. Perhaps Columbanus was attempting to appease his detractors in the Burgundian Church, accepting the Continental preference for episcopal oversight of penitential matters. This might also suggest that Finnian was referring to the two senior ranks, abbot and bishop, and not to abbot and priest. Furthermore, this may be indicative of the possibility that the drift in the meaning of *sacerdos* away from including 'bishop' was well underway by Columbanus' day.
[274] 'Quicumque fecerit homicidium, id est, proximum suum occiderit, iii annis inermis exsul in pane et aqua paeniteat...', *Paen. Columb.*, B §13.
[275] *Ibid*.
[276] 'Si quis clericus per rixam proximum suum percusserit et sanguine fuderit, annum integrum paeniteat; si laicus, xl diebus', *ibid*., B §9.

injured party, and if compensation cannot be made, he must work in their stead until recovered and pay for their doctor's fees, after which he must undergo forty days of penance of bread and water.[277] Though the penances in question do not align exactly with those of the *Ambrosianum* for this series of sins, Columbanus is much closer to this anonymous Penitential, in terms of detailed regulation and demands for compensation, than to the brief commands of Finnian. This may be indicative of the Irish Church becoming more familiar with secular Irish law after the time of Finnian, allowing for greater nuance in the terms of the *Ambrosianum* and Columbanus' Penitential.

This penitential, as in Finnian's, makes a distinction between the thought and act of a sin, but limits this nuance to monks, betraying, perhaps, a bias against clerics and the laity: monks strove to inculcate spiritual perfection within themselves through penance, but clerical and lay penance may have been seen as being a pale imitation for the expiation of sin, not moral excellence. Indeed, even in the case of the act of killing, we are provided with more information concerning the penances of the clergy and the laity than for monks. Both the offending cleric and layman must suffer their penance in exile, while the monk does not; perhaps it was understood that he was already in an exile from the world. This stipulation that a cleric or layman must suffer exile, and that the former must also secure the testimony of a bishop or priest, raises an interesting question: where did this exile take place? Are we to assume that Columbanus had secured the support of a network of bishops and priests in Gaul who had accepted his alien penitential discipline, and to whom he could send penitent clerics and laymen? Or was this 'exile' limited in its scope, implying that the penitent need only have removed himself to one of Columbanus' foundations, perhaps joining an order of penitents therein under the jurisdiction of a priest of the community? The possibility that this demand for exile and subsequent compensation of the victim's party is of Irish origin cannot be ignored, and, if such is the case, it may be suggestive of a network of Irish (or Irish influenced) foundations which did in fact share penitential precepts.[278]

While the Penitential of Columbanus lacks the detailed description of penances found in its predecessor, the durations of the punishments imposed are largely the same. The ten year period of exile for a cleric (and, for Columbanus, a monk) who has committed murder, the three year penalty for the lay culprit of the same crime, and the period of penance for the

[277] *Ibid.*, B §21.
[278] As noted previously, Finnian required that a penitent killer cleric suffer his penance *in alia urbe*, which may be indicative of a broad network of ecclesiastical centres which agreed on penitential practices; see above, n. 197.

shedding of blood, for example, are the same in the two penitentials, as is their demand for compensation for the families of the victim. The length of time spent living on bread and water during these penances is not specified by Columbanus, yet it is by Finnian, which may imply a custom that had become so well-known as to not require writing down. Also, unlike Finnian, the period of penitential food regulation for murder by a cleric would appear to be equal to that of the exile,[279] and no mention is made of deprivation of office. A layman suffers reduced sentences in comparison to clerics and monks, presumably following Finnian's logic that, since the layman is of the world, his crime is not as spiritually damaging and his reward in heaven will be of a lower quality. The period of exile for the crime of murder by a layman is equal in the two penitentials again,[280] as is the proscription against carrying arms, but Columbanus does not limit the time spent living on bread, nor does he mention relations with the wife of the layman. It may be that exile was understood to have precluded the layman from being with his wife, or that this was understood to be an element of the penitential practice, and so did not merit mention. Under Columbanus, as in Finnian, the penances for bloodshed by a cleric or layman are largely the same, though the layman does not suffer the elaborate payment to the church demanded by the latter. Columbanus would also seem to betray the growing influence of secular Irish thought on the Christian Church, demanding that the penitent killer must still render compensation to the victim's family, and outlining a more complete system of reparation for injury.[281] Curiously, unlike Finnian, Columbanus does not appear to make any provision for unpremeditated murder; perhaps the Irish *peregrinus* did not agree with such a nuance, preferring to see all forms of homicide as one crime.

While Columbanus' contribution was not written in Ireland, it is demonstrative of Irish penitential thought, not least because of its continuation and development of Finnian's Penitential. Accepting the premises of Finnian's demands on the penitent killer, Columbanus or his teachers altered the specific penances somewhat, and chose to dismiss the crime of unpremeditated killing; perhaps this was a step too far for some institutions which saw all killing as one crime, especially as it was not a distinction offered to the laity. The dismissal of such a nuance may lead one to think that this Penitential is a regression of sorts, but it may be

[279] Note that in Finnian the dietary element for this sin appears to last for only seven of the ten years' penance; *Pen. Vinn.*, §23.
[280] It should be noted that Finnian does not explicitly impose exile on the penitent lay killer, but such a penitent is expected to live apart from his wife during his penance, which could imply a form of exile; see *Pen. Vinn.*, §35.
[281] Secular Irish law from the time-period had detailed provisions for the maintenance of injured parties by those who had injured them; see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 129-133.

indicative of pastoral practicality; the aligning of terms of penance with terms of exile and the simplification of the understanding of killing may have been decided upon as a means of clarifying penitential demands and eliminating the more complicated aspects of the sin of killing. While he may have been out of step with Continental norms, Columbanus saw himself as being in keeping with the orthodoxy of his forefathers, to whom Christianity had been delivered by Rome itself,[282] and so, though we know only of his exploits in Gaul and Lombardy in any detail, he was an Irishman abroad holding firm to the teachings of his masters at Bangor, and in so keeping, his expression of penitential thought is not only suggestive of a wide adoption of Finnian's Penitential in the Irish Church, but it is also indicative of contemporary Irish thought on the matter, of a willingness to adopt and adapt to changing circumstances, especially concerning the sins of bloodshed.

2.4 Cummian's Penitential

After the tangibility of Columbanus, we return to a degree of ambiguity, as the identity of the Cummian to whom this penitential is attributed is less firmly established, and as such it may be useful to review the evidence in brief. Three possible candidates have been identified: a Bishop Cummian who retired to Bobbio,[283] Cummeneus Albus (Cuimíne Ailbe, Cummian 'the White'), seventh abbot of Iona (657-699),[284] and Cummianus Longus. The abbot of Iona may be immediately dismissed as the Penitential is attributed to (forms of the name) Cumianus Longus in two of the surviving manuscripts.[285] The association with the retired bishop has also been refuted,[286] not least because of the fact that the death of Cummianus

[282] Columbanus refers to Christianity having been delivered by Rome to Ireland, presumably a reference to the Palladian mission; Columbanus, *Epistula V*, pp. 36-57; §3.
[283] The epitaph of an Irish bishop named Cumianus was found at Bobbio (it has since vanished); he spent the final seventeen years of his life at the foundation, probably dying some time during the reign of Liutprand (r.712-744); see Kenney, *Sources*, p. 516.
[284] Cumméne Albus (Cuimíne Ailbe) belonged to Columba's kin-group, and served as the seventh abbot of Iona (657-669); see Kenney, *Sources*, p. 428, and Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p.3. Cumméne Albus was the author of the first known Life of Columba, of which only a single fragment survives, inserted into the Life written by Adomnán; see *VC* , III 5, and Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 3.
[285] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 6, and McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 98.
[286] McNeil and Gamer's argument that the Cummian of Clonfert can be equated to the Cummian who retired to Bobbio is refuted by Bieler, as is the association of this Cummian with the author of the *De controversia Paschali*; see McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, pp. 98-99, and Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 6. The claim of Cuimíne Fota of Clonfert's authorship of the *De controversia Paschali* and the Penitential is, however, affirmed by Ó Cróinín in numerous publications; see Walsh and Ó Cróinín (eds. and trans.), *Cummian's Letter*, pp. 13-15 and p. 217; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Cummianus Longus and the iconography of Christ

Longus is noted in the Annals for the year 662,[287] with the retired bishop dying sometime in the early eighth century.[288] A contemporary lament for the death of a bishop named Cuimíne Fota, son of Fiachno, notes that his body was carried down the River Shannon,[289] most likely from Cluain Ferta Brénainn (Clonfert, Co. Galway), an ecclesiastical site which was associated with the Éoganacht.[290] Cuimíne Fota is also referenced several times in the Old Irish Penitential and Old Irish Table of Commutations as a penitential authority.[291] It seems unlikely that there would be more than one 'Tall' Cummian (Cuimíne Fota being the Old Irish equivalent of Cummianus Longus) who had compiled a Penitential text, and so we can be reasonably assured that the author of the Penitential was Cummian of Clonfert who died in 662.

Though it does draw on the Penitential of Finnian, the Penitential of Cummian is heavily indebted to the *Ambrosianum*, especially along the vector of the present inquiry, *i.e.*, bloodshed. It is, consequently, a more comprehensive affair than Finnian, departing from the simple system of a series of sins and their penances for a more theologically-minded structure inspired by the eight capital sins as identified by Cassian, followed by a section on minor offences.[292] Cummian's work is not, however, simply a case of grafting a few passages from Finnian into the *Ambrosianum*; for example, the front matter concerning the methods of expiating sin is far more elaborate than in either precursor, and the author appears to have had not only the two earlier Penitentials before him to draw from, but also some of their source material.[293] This latter point may be indicative of access to a large library, such that the author could base his decisions on a wide variety of authorities, or specific appeals to authorities whose teachings were already confirmed by their inclusion in the preceding

---

and the Apostles in early Irish literature', in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), pp. 271-275; *idem*, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London, 1995), p. 187; and *idem*, 'Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169', pp. 378-379.

[287] The obit of Cummeni Longus is noted without geographic location in AU 662.1. He was associated with Clonfert, though it is unclear in what capacity; see Walsh and Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, pp. 13- 14.

[288] See above, n. 283.

[289] Francis J. Byrne, 'The Lament for Cummíne Foto', *Ériu* 31 (1980), p. 113 (on the dating of the poem), pp. 115-116 (the lament itself).

[290] *Ibid.*, p. 113 and p. 117.

[291] Cuimíne Fota is directly referred to in 'The Old-Irish Penitential': OI Pen., II, §21, and III, §2, §12, and §15. The demanded penance for leading another into, and for unknowingly committing, perjury (seven years and one year respectively) also agree in both texts, though explicit reference is not made to Cuimíne Fota in the Old-Irish Penitential; compare *Paen. Cumm.*, §§9-10 and OI Pen., §13.

[292] Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 5-6.

[293] In regards to the source material, Cummian refers to the *Sinodus Aquilonalis*, the *Praefatio Gildae*, and the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* independently of the *Ambrosianum*; see Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, pp. 15-16. Unless there is yet another forgotten penitential from which he could have drawn, it must be assumed that Cummian had copies of these documents to hand.

Penitentials. It may even have been the case that Cummian felt it necessary to elucidate the authorities behind his rulings more so than his predecessors as an illustration of orthodoxy in a period of religious difficulty. Charles-Edwards refers to this text as being the first 'comprehensive' penitential, dealing with a whole Christian society, in contrast to the 'particular' focus of Finnian, Columbanus, and the British texts,[294] an accolade which, thanks to Körntgern, must be attributed in large part to the *Ambrosianum*.

After the brevity of Columbanus and the plain construction of Finnian, and though it is heavily reliant on the *Ambrosianum*, this work seems to convey a greater sense of purpose and planning than its predecessors.[295] The Penitential of Cummian begins with a list of the various *remedia* by which the faithful can be cleansed of sin, beginning with the 'Christian birth' of the individual, and ending in a form of death:[296]

1. Baptism
2. The emotion of charity
3. Alms
4. Shedding of tears
5. Confession
6. Affliction of the heart and body
7. Renunciation of vice
8. Intercession of the saints
9. The merit of mercy and faith
10. Conversion and salvation of others
11. Pardoning and forgiving others
12. Martyrdom

[294] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', p. 218.
[295] Though page count is an indefinite metric to employ, in Bieler's edition the *Paen. Cumm.* is fourteen pages long, the *Pen. Vinn.* eleven, and *Paen. Columb.* only six, while Körntgern's *Ambrosianum* is thirteen. The *Pen. Vinn.* and *Paen. Columb.* immediately begin with the penitential prescriptions, while the *Paen. Cumm.* contains a prologue and epilogue which expound on the nature of the remedies for sin and the judgement of sinners. The *Paen. Amb.* has a brief prologue which discusses the medical qualities of penance and has no epilogue. Furthermore, the *Paen. Cumm.* has two chapters not found in the *Paen. Amb.*, one drawing on British material and Finnian, the other seemingly original: *Paen. Cumm.*, IX and X.
[296] *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus* §§2-13. These *remedia* are not an original creation of Cummian, but are drawn from Cassian's *Collationes*. The fact that Cassian omits a formal rite of penance may be explained by the fact that he was writing for a monastic audience who would already be living a life of penitence; see Rob Meens, 'Remedies for sin', in Thomas F. X. Noble, Julia M. Smith, and Roberta A. Baranowski (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: vol. 3, Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600-c. 1100* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 399-400.

Several of these *remedia* were, one might imagine, necessarily employed in penitential practice itself: confession (5) and the shedding of tears (4), physical and mental hardship (6), the renouncing of vice (7), and, perhaps, the provision of alms (3). Penance may also have been understood as a form of martyrdom (12), a type of holy suffering which may not have necessitated the expiration of the penitent.[297] It may also have been expected that, under this system, the confessor stood to benefit from the act of confession, as it allowed him to demonstrate mercy and faith (9), and participate in the conversion of wrong-doers from sin, leading to their salvation (10),[298] which would have necessitated pardoning and forgiving them of their sins (11).[299] Unlike his archetypes, Cummian explicitly grounds his penitential teaching in biblical precedent while also creating a sense of spiritual symbiosis between confessor and sinner, and introduces the intercession of saints as a path to the remission of sin, which, in combination of his greater use of the British authorities, generates an impression of community and weight. What I mean by this is that, in his prologue, Cummian describes a penitential system which encompasses the whole Church, and not just in the sense of an inclusive penitential rule for lay and religious, but one which connects his present to the biblical past, and the living with the dead, through the acts of confession, penance, and forgiveness. This is a conceptual break from Finnian and the *Ambrosianum*, which carry a pervasive sense of practicality, of having been constructed from experience and pastoral demands.[300] Given the period during which he was active, this grander vision of penance may be a consequence of the divisive nature of the Easter Controversy, and this Penitential may be Cummian's appeal to his fellow ecclesiastics to join in a universal system. Whatever the case

[297] Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 41-46.

[298] Indeed, on this point the text explicitly refers to James 5:20, which states that he who converts a sinner from his ways will himself save his own soul and be relieved of many of his own sins; *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus*, §11. This sense of the confessor being rewarded for the conversion of sinner is repeated in the epilogue of the work; *Paen. Cumm.*, *postscriptum*, §§4-5.

[299] Meens has suggested that Cummian's omission of a formal ecclesiastical rite of penance can be explained by such a system not having yet been established in Ireland, noting that formal penance is included in a list, widely circulated in the Middle Ages, of remedies for sin by Origen; see Meens, 'Remedies for sin', pp. 399-400.

[300] Finnian's Penitential carries a sense of a learned holy man who wishes to commit to writing his thoughts on penitential matters born of personal or institutional confrontation with the various sins listed for his successors, and he does not frame his work in biblical quotations or appeals to authority, his concluding remarks only vaguely noting that he based his work on Scriptural teachings and the opinions of certain wise men, 'opinionem quorundam doctissimorum'; *Pen. Vinn., postscriptum*. In contrast, the *Ambrosianum* does have a prologue, though it lacks any concluding remarks. This prologue, like Finnian's conclusion, conveys a sense of necessity, of the author gathering together penances based on actual encounters; indeed, the author of the text states that he was compelled to write by pastoral concerns and the demands of his brothers; 'Pastorali sollicitudine ac deuota fratrum postulatione constrictus ad componenda spiritalium uulnerum medicamenta paruitatem peritiae meae temerarius medicinalium medici pigmentorum collector ultra uires contuli, quaedam ex legis diuinae praeiudicio indubitanter diiundicans et, ubi ueritas uergere ac praeponderare mihi uidebatur, consentiens atque decernens qualitatis uel quantitatis mensurandae poenitentiae periculoso opera laqueoque, ut dicitur, prudens pedem indidi, non praeiudicans his, qui sagatiore gratia sanitatum et peritia salubriori sancto spiritu illuminante redundant', *Paen. Amb., prologus*.

may have been, in terms of bloodshed, Cummian's Penitential is an expression of the continuation and amalgamation of the penitential traditions expressed in Finnian and the *Ambrosianum*, and is not without its own nuances and twists.

Agreeing with Finnian and the *Ambrosianum*, Cummian states that whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and though the penance for this 'thought-crime' echoes the anonymous Penitential, it reduces the penance to a simplified ruling that such a sinner must undergo penance of bread and water until he overcomes his hatred, and then be joined with the one he hates 'in sincere charity'.[301] If thought becomes deed, it is quite a different matter altogether. The act of premeditated murder is corrected by the renunciation of arms until death, with the additional demand that the offender be considered 'dead unto the world',[302] which is a noteworthy divergence from the limited terms of penance offered by Finnian or Columbanus for the same crime, though being in agreement with the enduring demands of the *Ambrosianum*. While it is not explicitly stated, it was presumably the case that a such a sinner was to become an inmate of a monastery until his death; indeed the following canon states that if the culprit has taken a vow of perfection, he too shall be considered dead unto the world, but must also live in perpetual exile,[303] a logical move to distance him from the religious community in which he committed his crime. The crime of unpremeditated murder demands three years of penance on bread and water, with alms and prayers, again following the *Ambrosianum*.[304] Also carried through from the anonymous Penitential is the penance for

[301] *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §4; compare to *Pen. Vinn.*, §§2-3 and §8, and *Paen. Amb*., IV §2. One can only hope that 'being joined' to the object of one's murderous desires would not lead to unintended consequences. This punishment of a crime thought of, but not enacted, is echoed later in the same section, where one who is agitated by another is compelled to inform and make satisfaction with the one who has incensed them, otherwise he is to be cut off from the company of saints, after which, if he does repent, he must undergo penance for the same duration of time that he was disobedient; *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §§15-16.

[302] 'Qui homicidium odii meditatione facit, relictis armis usque ad mortem mortuus mundo uiuat Dei', *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §5.

[303] 'Si autem post uota perfectionis, cum peregrinatione perenni mundo moriatur', *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §6. Note that the 'exile' here is a *peregrinus*, perhaps implying that there is a greater spiritual facet to the displacement of this individual, unlike the *exul* of *Paen. Columb.*, B §13, a layman who must undertake three years of exile for homicide. It should also be noted that Cummian corrects the *Ambrosianum* on this sentence, as the latter refers the reader to the *Sinodus Luci Victorie* for another ruling on this sin, suggesting that the penance is different for one who has committed the crime after having taken a vow of perfection when it is in fact the same; see *Sinodus Luci*, §2, and *Paen. Amb.*, IV §4. Cummian's alteration of the *Ambrosianum*, the placing of an even greater penitential demand on one who has taken a vow, would appear to echo the Council of Épaone, where it was decided that a deacon or presbyter who had committed a capital crime (such as killing) was to be removed from his office and dispatched to a monastery, where he was to be refused communion, presumably as part of a penitential sentence, until death: 'Si diaconus aut presbyter crimen capitale conmiserit, ab oficii honore depositius in monasterio retrudatur, ini tantummodo quamdiu uixerit communion sumenda', *Concilium Epaonense*, §22. This decree itself may be an elaboration of 'Si presbyter uel diaconus crimen capitale commiserit, simul et officio et communion pellatur', *Concilium Aurelianense*, §9.

[304] *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §7.

unintentional killing by accident, a sin may be remitted by penance of one year, though again Cummian has reduced the complexity of *Ambrosianum* to the essentials.[305]

Following this discussion of the crime of killing are the penances for violent crimes which may lead to injury which are faithful to the decisions of the *Ambrosianum*. One who strikes another and renders him incapacitated or maimed must pay for the injured party's medical expenses, do his work while he is incapable of doing it himself, and undertake penance for half a year,[306] unless he cannot afford to do so, in which case he must do penance for a year.[307] Striking another without causing serious harm demands penance for one to three forty-day periods, presumably based on the severity of the injury.[308]

In a chapter which owes nothing to the *Ambrosianum*, Cummian prescribes the laying down of arms, exclusion from the world, and service to God for those who, through aiding barbarians, bring slaughter to Christians.[309] If they help barbarians but such violence does not occur, the penalty is reduced to penance for fourteen years. This decree is clearly taken from the *Sinodus Luci Victorie*,[310] which was in all likelihood referring to early sixth century pagan Anglo-Saxon invaders. While it was unlikely that Cummian's establishment was under threat of attack from Anglo-Saxon invaders, it might be assumed that he was referring to some pagan remnant of Irish society and discovered a useful precedent through which to condemn them. A more plausible scenario, however, is that the author of the text was applying an old rule to a contemporary issue, that the violent attackers in question were Christians themselves, at least nominally, and were acting like pagans or barbarians, brigands outside the authority of the Church preying on Christian communities (more evidence of which will be discussed in Chapter 7). Perhaps in support of this theory, it is interesting to note that the attackers are referred to as *barbari*, not *gentiles*, as one might expect.

As noted, Cummian conveys the same attitude towards premeditated murder as the *Ambrosianum*, which runs a different tack to Finnian and Columbanus: permanent penance

[305] *Ibid.*, IV §8; compare to *Paen. Amb.*, IV §5. It may have been that the new sin of accidental killing introduced by the *Ambrosianum* was not widely accepted at the time, which is why it expected such an offender to flee to the Church for protection, but by Cummian's day it had become an established tradition, allowing him to jettison an unnecessary part of his antecedent.
[306] *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §9.
[307] *Ibid.*, IV §10.
[308] *Ibid.*, IV §11. These three forty-day periods were, presumably, the 'Three Lents', *samchogus*, 'summer Lent', *gamchogus* 'winter Lent' (prior to Christmas), and, of course, the Lenten period prior to Easter; see Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'Irish Observance of the Three Lents and the Date of the St Gall Priscian (MS 904), *Ériu*, 51 (2000), p. 166.
[309] *Paen. Cumm*, IX §13.
[310] *Sinodus Luci*, §4.

for both lay and religious. The penance for unpremeditated killing is carried through from its British precedent, the *Sinodus Luci Victorie*, though broadened to encompass the laity. The nuance of accidental killing is also carried forward from the *Ambrosianum*, and the demand for compensation in the penances concerning injury echoes all three previous Penitentials. This is not to say that Cummian does not himself contribute to the discourse of penance (not only does he add two new sections on petty cases and the sins of boys, the latter of which has no precedent, he adds extensively to many of the chapters laid out in his model),[311] but he is, in terms of bloodshed, in keeping with the now established traditions of penance for the desire to kill, unpremeditated killing, and the inflicting of serious injury, while also drawing on the *Ambrosianum*'s demand for the permanent penance of a wilful homicide and the recognition of accidental killing. The latter's frequent refrain that penance is to be judged by a *sacerdos* is not found in Cummian, which may be, along with the condensing of the borrowed decrees, indicative of the Church's success in implementing this penitential system: the methods and details of confession and penance are so well understood that Cummian can focus on the sins themselves, of which there are many. Indeed, the fact that Cummian adds many new sins to so much of the core set out in his archetype while leaving *De ira* and the sins of bloodshed largely intact may be suggestive of a certain acceptance or confirmed tradition of these rulings. While it cannot be said for certain that such penitential practices were offered beyond Clonfert, Cummian's little book of penance soon found its way into the hands of Theodore of Tarsus, which suggests that, at the very least, it was known to Irish foundations in Britain, if not a widely used and accepted handbook across the lands of the Irish.

2.5 Changes and Developments in the First Penitentials

Over the course of approximately two centuries, the Irish Church moved from a position on penitential practice which was, presumably, fully in line with Roman teachings and organisation, as set out by the Palladian mission, possibly reinforced by the Patrician, such that penitential practice was under episcopal jurisdiction, confession was public, the forms of killing had little gradation, and major sins carried permanent consequences, to one which

[311] See Körntgen, *frühmittelalterliche Bußbücher*, pp. 15-16. The two new sections are *Paen. Cumm.*, IX and X.

expanded the systematic regulation of repeatable and fixed-term penance of monasteries to the outside world, allowed for private confession and penance, and catered for a wide range of nuanced sins. In essence, the monastic form of penance came to be applied to the laity. This was nothing short of a paradigm shift, especially in terms of focus of the present study of the sin of killing. At this time, the Continental Church was largely agreed that the clergy could not participate in warfare, and, if they did, they would have to undergo penance, and could never advance in rank.[312] Certain nuances concerning bloodshed among the laity were creeping in concerning the difference between premeditated murder and manslaughter,[313] nuances which the Penitential of Finnian only offers to those who have taken a holy vow, yet which the *Ambrosianum* offers to all.

Finnian offered a simplified penance for a cleric who committed the sin of bloodshed, which stands in contrast to the *Excerpta de Libro Dauidis*. Instead of the gradation of terms for different ranks of the clergy,[314] there is only one penance for murder, and one for killing at 'the prompting of the devil', applied to all.[315] This gradation may be due to a difference in opinion in the Insular Churches as to the recognition of the greater spiritual responsibilities and awareness of the offender. It may also have been the case that Finnian sought to create a stream-lined and easily implemented system, or wished to convey the notion that the sin of bloodshed is universally reprehensible, such that the grade of the individual who committed the crime did not matter.[316]

It would seem reasonable to assume that the monks and clergy referred to in the Penitential of Finnian would have already renounced violence, and that any penance that they had to undertake would have been as part of a continuous penitential act striving towards spiritual purification. This is very different from the attitude that the Penitential shows towards the laity; the one-penance-fits-all approach to lay bloodshed irrespective of intent is indicative of the notion that the laity are not on the path of spiritual perfection, but are rather

[312] *Synod of Nicaea, 325*, §12; *Synod of Rome, January 386*, §3; 'The So-Called Apostolic Canons', §83 (82); *Synod of Rome, 402*, §4; and *The Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, 451*, §7, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, p. 417, and p. 490; vol. 2, p. 387, and p. 409; and vol. 3, p. 392. The Spanish Church appears to have run contrary to this demand, stating that one who had served in war could advance to the diaconate; *The First Synod of Toledo, September 400*, §8, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 2, p. 420.
[313] *Synod of Elvira, 305/306*, §5; *Synod of Ancyra*, §22 and §23, in Hefele, *Councils*, vol. 1, p. 140, and pp. 220-221. Also, as discussed previously, *Sinodus Luci*, §2 discusses killing without malice aforethought.
[314] Thirteen years penance for a bishop, seven for a presbyter, six for a deacon, and four for a monk; *Dauidis*, §7.
[315] *Pen. Vinn.*, §24.
[316] When the two texts in question are compared (see above, nn. 314-315), it is clear that, in terms of duration, the bishop is the only one who could be seen to profit from Finnian's system, as they would be the only one to see their penance reduced.

hoping to keep the ledger of their souls in the black, or as close to it as possible, in the belief that, when their hour of Judgement came, they would have whittled away at the duration of the purgative expiation of their sins in the afterlife. This standpoint is implied by the belief that, since the laity remain 'of the world', their reward in Heaven would have been of a lower quality than those who had removed themselves from the world, which is to say, those who had taken monastic vows. The Penitential of Finnian is reaching out to the laity, offering them some hope for the remission of their sins, while recognising that they remain in the world, and prone to the repetition of their sins, along with the belief, perhaps, that they would not fully understand the implications of penance, or the extent of the repercussions of falling into sin. When a monk or a clergyman, climbing high on the ladder to perfection, falls into sin, they fall from a higher rung to the ground, and so must work harder to redeem themselves, where a layman, not matter how high he climbs, is never that far from the ground, and so he need not work so hard to return to his former lowly rung. The sin of bloodshed by a layman does not necessitate fine distinctions as he can only achieve so much, he lives in the sinful world, and will probably fall into sin again.

One of the key (even revolutionary) aspects of these Penitentials is that monastic fixed-term penance is offered to the laity on a systematic basis; it has been argued, however, that this laity is not the general Christian public, but a pastorally limited element of the laity who were tenants of the Church: the *manaig*.[317] The four British texts, along with Finnian, illustrate that the clergy and monks were considered to be a group apart from lay society, a division dismissed by the *Ambrosianum*. None of these documents, however, offer any clear depiction of whom among the laity they expected to undertake penance; was it understood that only the lay tenants of the Church would bow to such ecclesiastical demands, or was it the duty of every good Christian to confess? The practical reality of penance may have been that it was not possible for churchmen to impose the practice on the laity except those who were legally bound to it, while at the same time hoping that it would become a widespread and accepted custom over time. In contrast to this, as shall be discussed later, in the *Vita Columbae* we are presented with several individuals who appear to depart from their homeland to suffer penance under the guidance of Columba, illustrating the belief that a layman could submit to penance even if he was not a *manach* of a religious centre. The *Ambrosianum* also suggests that penance was under episcopal jurisdiction (as indeed might

[317] See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 64-67 and p. 252, and Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, pp. 48-49.

the Penitential of Finnian, if the author can be identified with the Bishop of Mag mBili), which itself may be indicative of the application of penance to the community beyond the *manaig*; an abbot might extend the rewards of monastic penance to his lay dependants, but a bishop may have been required to offer such pastoral care to the whole of the *túath* under his rule. A monastically trained bishop might have seen the benefits of drawing on fixed-term penance, especially where the episcopal and abbatial lines were blurred.[318]

These texts, certainly known in Ireland if not produced there, are strongly indicative of the administration of penance by priests under episcopal jurisdiction, even though such penance bears the clear imprint of monastic, fixed-term restitution. As noted, some of these texts do not appear to consider the act of killing by a layman to be a particularly heinous sin, which could be absolved through a brief penance, though the ultimate reward which awaited the layman in the afterlife would be of a lesser quality. The fact that the *Ambrosianum* demands permanent penance of a lay killer may be indicative of bringing Insular penitential thought in line with Continental thought, over-ruling the striking brevity offered by Finnian and drawing in the nuances of killing in anger or by accident. This point might seem contradictory when one recalls the terms of penance for killing imposed by the Continental synods, yet, it must be kept in mind that such penitents were expected to endure a lifetime of restraint after completing their penitential terms. In a system where fixed-terms were available to a layman, where a sinner can return to his wife and take up arms again and again after completing his penance for any of the sins of bloodshed except murder, it may have been necessary to make explicit to an Insular penitent the implicit permanent penance expected of a Continental penitent.

If the *Ambrosianum* is the product of an Irish institution, it may be that it was a response to Finnian, couched as it is in Insular thought, by a southern church inclined to orthodoxy with Rome, making greater use of Cassian and established synodal decisions. If the two texts were roughly contemporaneous, we are presented with two competing models of penance: one dismisses the laity as being 'of the world' and considers all forms of lay killing equal, while the other gathers lay and religious together and treats them according to their sins, which are nuanced and graded. It may have been the case that this competition

[318] The Annals of Ulster, for example, record several bishop-abbots over the early medieval period in Ireland: for example, 'Cilleni episcopus abbas Fernann', AU 715.1; 'Dub Duin nepos Faelain episcopus, abbas Cluana Irairdd', AU 718.5; 'Tomas, episcopus, scriba, abbas Linne Duachal, quieuit', AU 808.2; and 'Nuadha Locha h-Uamae, episcopus et ancorita, abbas Airdd Machae, dormiuit', AU 812.4; One other such abbot-bishop will be studied in detail later in this thesis, Máel Ruain of Tallaght.

between the two models is what inspired Cummian to create his Penitential, perhaps in an attempt to merge the more successful or useful aspects of both traditions. Whatever the case may have been, from the time of Palladius to that of Cummian, the attitude of the Irish Church appears to have changed radically, moving from (presumably) public confession and effectively permanent penance for the most dire of sins to private confession and fixed-term, repeatable penance for all but the most wicked of crimes. The next generation of Insular penitentials would not only build on these new precepts, carving out ever more refined nuances and subtleties, but would advance, in terms of the sins of bloodshed, one more dramatic shift in the understanding of killing, and the relationship between the Church and the laity. Before advancing to this next phase of penitential handbooks, we shall first examine the attitudes towards penance and bloodshed in the Irish Church in narrative and legal texts; we turn now from the seeds sown in the age of missionaries and saints to fruits reaped by the new age of hagiographers and legalists.

Chapter 3: Penance and Bloodshed in the Lives of Brigit and Patrick

3.1 The Lives of Saints

Saints' Lives, collections of the miraculous deeds of holy figures, originated in the early Christian East and inevitably made their way to the West, retaining in the hands of the early Irish hagiographers the dual role of extolling the virtues of the subjects in question as exemplars of good Christian lives, and of fulfilling the contemporary aims of the writers themselves. The Lives of Anthony and of Martin of Tours, for example, recorded the traditions associated with the saints and also served to further the goals of the authors, Athanasius and Sulpicius Severus.[319] In a similar fashion, the earliest Lives of Irish saints were designed to enhance the prestige of a given ecclesiastical establishment through the aggrandisement of their patron, legitimising territorial claims and enhancing secular relations by aligning the actions of the saints with important kin-groups, and asserting the contemporary political affiliations of the author and their institution through the exploits of the subject. While such accounts are not strictly factual, they provide valuable insight into how the various Irish Churches perceived their roles in early Irish society,[320] such that the modern reader may be able to discern the attitudes of the early medieval hagiographer towards penance and bloodshed.

The texts examined so far have been primarily canonical in nature, which is to say, prescriptive, setting down the types of sin and the correct procedures for their remission. To use a modern analogy, they are akin to books of law, and so, while they may have been the agreed set of rules for the application of penance, they stand apart from the community; a law may be enacted as a consequence of some societal force, and it may have been designed with

[319] Athanasius informs us in his preface that he was prompted to write the Life of Anthony by the demands of foreign monks, but, at the same time, his underlying goal in writing the text was to promote Nicene theology and anti-Arianism; see Athanasius, 'Life of Anthony' in Carolinne White (ed. & trans), *Early Christian Lives* (London, 1998), p. 7, and White's preceding commentary, pp. 3-4. Sulpicius states that his goal is provide future generations with a saintly example to emulate, while he may have also used the Life to explain his own conversion to Christianity and as an attack on Classical culture; Sulpicius Severus, 'Life of Martin of Tours', in Carolinne White (ed. & trans), *Early Christian Lives* (London, 1998), p. 135, noting again White's commentary on p. 132.

[320] McCone notes that 'the Irish saints' Lives are a mine of social information, and a rich yield can be expected from them in conjunction with other sources…', Kim McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', in *The Maynooth Review/Revieú Mhá Nuad*, vol. 11 (Dec., 1984), p. 57.

a certain impact in mind, but it does not reveal how that society understood or reacted to that law. Correspondingly, the various penitential texts only show one side of the debate, illustrating a legal framework, but not enforcement or appreciation. To continue the legal analogy, the Lives of saints might be considered to be a parallel to works of contemporary crime fiction, in that, while the events or characters may be fictitious, the situations, beliefs, and attitudes depicted must ring true to the reader, and, in so doing, they allow any careful investigator to glean the prevailing attitudes towards certain crimes, such as killing. This analogy fails at a certain point as it is not the law-courts that produce these fictional works to add literary reinforcement to their decrees (nor indeed is it novelists who write laws!), as was the case with the medieval Church, but this failure actually serves to underline the validity of the argument: saints' Lives reveal the attitudes of their producers towards penance and bloodshed in a fashion that is more immediate, more colloquial than any penitential. These works thus offer a separate avenue of investigation, providing hints of the actual practice of penance and the understanding of the nature of violent deeds. In the *Liber Angeli*, for example, we are told of organised groups of penitents living at Armagh,[321] and the *Vita Columbae* also refers to penitential colonies at Hinba and Tiree,[322] which would suggest that there were sufficient numbers of willing participants in the practice of penance, and that they were an important aspect of the community, meriting not only notice in these texts, but also their own separate spaces within ecclesiastical settlements, something to which the various Insular Penitentials only hint. In spite of the possibility that such locations were mentioned or exaggerated by the hagiographers to enhance the prestige of their own establishment, perhaps as an illustration of the temporal power and moral authority of their patron church, however large or well-attended these groups of penitents were, it seems clear that they did exist. Approached with due caution, the saints' Lives may offer useful information about the practice and perception of penance among the Irish Churches. Where we encounter penance and bloodshed we are confronted with the saint's (and therefore his or her institution's) standpoint, which is, as we shall see, not always what a modern reader might expect of a holy and just individual.

[321] *Liber Angeli*, in Bieler, L. (ed. & trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 184-191, §15.
[322] Adomnán of Iona, *Vita Columbae*, in Anderson, A.O., and Anderson, M.O. (eds. & trans.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Oxford, 1991), I 21 and II 39.

Even though only a relatively small number of early medieval Irish saints' Lives have survived,[323] the present investigation has been limited to the Lives of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick, the pre-eminent saints of the Irish, not only because of the inherent complexities of teasing out the interwoven traditions and textual relationships of these texts alone, but also as the various Lives of these saints offer contrasting views from within their own cults, are attached to institutions which wielded great influence, and represent figures of enduring affection and relevance. The Lives of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick offer numerous examples of individuals who seek out these saints for their guidance and, in some instances, submit to their demands for penance (though it is not always successfully completed). The difficulty here lies in trying to decipher who is speaking: is the writer providing us with an account of a saint's actual decree or is he informing us of contemporary attitudes, or something in between? While the hagiographers may not provide factual accounts of Brigit and Patrick, or of the era in which they were supposedly active, they do grant an insight into the historical period of the writers themselves and the aims of their institutions.[324] In contrast to this we have Adomnán, an apparently scrupulous researcher who had access to oral accounts of near-contemporaries of his subject and written material.[325] Considering his chronological proximity to Columba, and the enduring memory of the saint in his own community, Adomnán may not have had the scope to augment the *Life* of his subject as did the hagiographers of Brigit and Patrick. One must remain sceptical, however, as it is clear that Adomnán shaped the image of Columba to suit his own agenda of creating a timeless prophet-saint and anointer of kings in an effort to secure Iona's enduring legacy. That said, the *Vita Columbae* paints a very realistic, if not real, picture of penitential practice at Iona. Such imagery will be discussed in the following chapter, where Adomnán's works will be discussed in detail; this chapter will focus on the Lives of Brigit and Patrick, the two 'pillars of the Irish'.[326] Wading carefully into the sea of Irish hagiography, one must remember that surface ripples mask deeper currents.

[323] Aside from the various Lives of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick, Sharpe has identified a group of nine Lives from around the year 800; see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Live: An Introduction to the Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 338-339.
[324] For example, both Cogitosus and Tírechán proclaim the legitimate primacy of their respective patrons' foundations while creating largely fictional accounts of their lives to support such claims; Cogitosus, *Vita II Sanctae Brigitae*, *Acta Sanctorum, Feb. I*, pp. 135-141, §8.39, and Tírechán, *Collectanea*, in Bieler, L. (ed. & trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 122-167, III 7 §57.1, pp. 162-163.
[325] '...ex his quae ante nos inserta paginis repperire potuimus, uel ex his quae auditu ab expertis quibusdam fidelibus antiquis sine ulla dubitatione narrantibus diligentius sciscitantes didicimus', *VC*, *Secunda praefatio*.
[326] '...sanctum Patricium Hibernensium Brigitamque columpnas...', *Liber Angeli*, XI 3 (32), pp. 190-191.

3.2 The Patrician Texts

3.2.1 The authors and their texts

As we have seen, Patrick appears to have been a man who believed that he was charged by God to bring Christianity to the furthermost reaches of the world, which is to say, the north-west of Ireland. Beset by criticisms from abroad and more immediate threats upon his own life, this evangelical bishop left two documents to posterity that portray a very human character. The figure we are confronted with in the earliest surviving Lives that purport to be about this man is a radically different individual, a great hero-saint, a smiter of druids, and an antagonist to kings who offend him, or the benefactor of their line if they appease him. This is the image of a saint designed, after a fashion, by the organisation that claimed to be heir to his authority; two centuries after his death the politicisation of Patrick's memory for ecclesiastical goals reached bombastic heights with Armagh promoting his cult in an effort to secure its primacy over of all the churches of Ireland (save Leinster), as demonstrated by the *Liber Angeli*[327] and the two Lives by Tírechán[328] and Muirchú.[329]

The *Liber Angeli* is an expression of Armagh's claims of territorial and ecclesiastical supremacy framed by an encounter between Patrick and an angel, a motif which was probably added at a later date.[330] Armagh's privileged position, as it is outlined in the document, is not based solely on its own sanctity and relationship with Patrick, but on its possession of relics of the apostles Peter and Paul, of the martyrs Stephen and Laurence, and of a cloth stained with the blood of Christ, among the remains of a variety of other saints and holy men.[331] This is an impressive list of holy artefacts save for the fact that there is no sign of Patrick's body,[332] a situation, we can easily imagine, that would have been a source of great embarrassment to Armagh. The *Liber Angeli* states that Armagh is the highest ecclesiastical court in Ireland, and that only Rome surpasses it, in series of canons drawing

[327] *Liber Angeli*, in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 184-191
[328] Tírechán, *Collectanea*, in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 122-167.
[329] Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 61-123.
[330] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 52, and *Liber Angeli*, §8, §13, and §§17-18.
[331] *Liber Angeli*, §§18-19.
[332] Patrick was buried at Dún Lethglaise (Downpatrick, Co. Down) in the territory of the Ulaid, the enduring rivals of the Uí Néill and their subjects, the Airgialla, who controlled Armagh; see Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, II §11 (9), pp. 120-121.

their authority from the forged 'signatures' of Auxilius, Patrick, Secundinus, and Benignus.[333] Bieler argues that, on the grounds of the ecclesiastical terminology used, this work was composed after Tírechán and Muirchú, probably in the eighth century.[334] It has been suggested, however, that it precedes them, and that it was known to Tírechán.[335]

Tírechán's work on Patrick is quite different from the Lives composed by Muirchú, Adomnán, and Cogitosus, in that it would appear to be more influenced by the native secular traditions of biography than by Continental hagiography.[336] Each of these writers had, at the very least, one common goal: to assert the power of their chosen patron for political ends.[337] Tírechán blatantly connects Patrick's conversion of, and favour towards, a variety of politically important families and individuals, and the foundation of numerous churches in the sixth century with Armagh's demand for dues and support in the seventh.[338] Tírechán tells us little of himself other than that he was a bishop, and a pupil and fosterling of Ultán.[339] It is upon the book and the recollections of oral traditions concerning Patrick by his master that Tírechán based the first volume of his own work,[340] coupled with reference to the saint's own writings.[341] This link to Ultán provides one dating criterion for the text, as he is recorded as having died in 657, a vague reference point at best, as Tírechán could have begun collecting

[333] *Liber Angeli*, §§27-30; on the forged signatures, see Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 53.
[334] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 54.
[335] Charles-Edwards places the *Liber Angeli* as slightly earlier than Tírechán, also preceding Muirchú, at *c*.678 x *c*.687; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 438-440.
[336] McCone, 'An Introduction into Early Irish Saints' Lives', p. 31.
[337] Catherine Swift has argued against this view concerning Tírechán specifically, stating that he was rather seeking to gain support for the revival of the kingdom of Armagh; Catherine Swift, 'Tírechán's Motives in Compiling the "Collectanea": An Alternative Interpretation', *Éiru*, 45 (1994), pp. 80-82.
[338] For example, Patrick requires that the sons of Conall son of Níall pay perpetual dues to his 'sons in the Faith', an association worth reminding the contemporary leaders of the Cenél Conaill of, and Tírechán explains that his own people, the Uí Amolngada, are 'servants of Patrick to the present day' as a result of one of the sons of the eponymous ancestor-figure offering his inheritance to the saint; see Tírechán, *Collectanea*, [III 1] §10 and §15, pp. 132-135. Bieler refers to Tírechán's work as 'little more than a catalogue of places and persons, with just a touch of the miraculous here and there'; Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 36.
[339] Tírechán informs us that he recorded the testimony of one *Ultanum episcopum Conchuburnensium*, that is Ultán, bishop of Conor, concerning certain details of Patrick's life, and also consulted a book that was in this bishop's possession on the names of his subject; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, [III 1] *tit*., §1 (1), and §1 (6), pp. 124-125. Muirchú informs us that he consulted the same book; Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, Second Preface, §6. Ultán (d. 657), bishop of Ardbraccan, or of Dál Conchobair (the former is an ecclesiastical site, and the latter is a regional or kin-group designation), also wrote a (now lost) Life of Brigit; see Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: a saint with three Lives?', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 134-135, and Richard Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*: the oldest texts', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), p. 101. It is remarkable that an establishment in Meath, some eighty kilometres south of Armagh and seventy north of Kildare, took such an interest in Patrick, an indication of how widespread his cult was. The fact that Ultán saw no conflict in writing a Life of Patrick and of Brigit may hint at the fact that these cults were not at odds with one another during his lifetime, or that they had not yet been appropriated for the political machinations of Armagh and Kildare.
[340] Tírechán, *Collectanea*, [III 1] *tit*., and [III1] §1 (1), pp. 124-125.
[341] Hints are found within the text, but, conveniently, Tírechán refers specifically to Patrick's *Confessio* on one occasion, Tírechán [III 1] §15 (4), pp. 134-137.

material for his work some time before this, continuing to do so long after the death of his master.[342] This can be narrowed down to an approximate period of *c*.688x693 by taking account of the various political associations and references to plagues found within the text.[343]

Like Tírechán, Muirchú maccu Machteni does not appear to have written his work directly for Armagh, but rather dedicates his *Life of Patrick* to Bishop Áed of Sléibte, who chose to unite his establishment with the *paruchia Patricii* sometime during the episcopacy of Ségéne at Armagh (661-688).[344] If this is the same Áed who is recorded as dying as an anchorite in 700, he may have resigned his position as bishop at Sléibte and left for Armagh, where he may have met Muirchú, whose family was local to the Plain of Armagh.[345] Both Muirchú and Áed are listed as signatories of the *Cáin Adomnáin*.[346] Bieler suggests a very broad period of possible composition, 661-700,[347] which Charles-Edwards narrows to *c*.695, based on the notion that the Preface (which refers directly to Áed as if he were living) was probably the last section to be written.[348] Muirchú informs us that he consulted a work on Patrick in the possession of Ultán,[349] and it is clear from the text that he also had his subject's own *Confessio*, and possibly the *Epistola*, before him,[350] but does not appear to use these latter two in any detail. It is interesting to note that Muirchú seems to have chosen to ignore Patrick's strongest criticism of apostasy and violence towards the faithful (the inherent aspect of the *Epistola*) and to completely omit of the demand for penance, noting only that a certain murderous British king was admonished by Patrick, and that this individual was eventually punished for his refusal to repent his ways by being transformed into a fox.[351]

[342] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 41-42.
[343] For the arguments asserting this date range, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 439-440.
[344] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 1.
[345] *Ibid*.
[346] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, in Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Adamnáin: An Old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adamnan* (Oxford, 1905), §28.
[347] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 1-2.
[348] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 439-440. Connolly cautiously narrows Bieler's dating of Muirchú's *Vita Patricii* to about 680, but affirms no date to the text other than it is from roughly 700; see Connolly, 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit"', p. 5.
[349] Muirchú, *Prologus*, §6, pp. 62-63.
[350] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 14-17. The first, and clearest, indication that Muirchú was using Patrick's *Confessio* is in the earliest sections concerning his captivity and flight from Ireland, which parallels the saint's descriptions almost precisely; Muirchú, I §§1-5, pp. 66-71. Muirchú mentions a letter written by Patrick to Coroticus, but does not explicitly draw from the text itself; Muirchú, I §29 (28), p. 100-101.
[351] Muirchú, I §29, pp. 100-101.

3.2.2 Bloodshed and penance in the Patrician texts

In each of the three Patrician texts we find reference to penance and confession, and even episodes which may be penitential in nature, but rarely is the actual process of penance, its duration, or nature described in any detail. Certain attitudes, however, may be gleaned from these scant indications. The *Liber Angeli*, for example, refers to three orders consisting of both sexes living at Armagh: virgins, penitents, and those serving the church while living in legal matrimony.[352] These orders are permitted to attend Sunday mass in the church of the northern district of Armagh, while the clergy attend the southern basilica.[353] What kind of regime these penitents lived under is left unsaid, as is the duration of their time at Armagh. In the same work, it is stated that Patrick 'proceeded from the city of Armagh to the multitudes of both kinds of the human sex to baptise, to teach, and to heal near the well nearby at the eastern region of the aforementioned city'.[354] Patrick's efforts to heal the multitude, *sanadus*, may have had a spiritual, rather than a physical, sense, which may imply the hearing of confession and the imposing of penance. This might suggest that confession was a relatively popular exercise undertaken by the laity at Armagh, and there was a specific location where confession was heard. One might wonder if permanent penitential discipline was required of these individuals, or if Armagh accepted penance of defined terms, a question neatly answered later in the same work when discussing the failure to offer appropriate hospitality the bishop of Armagh: the offender must suffer seven years' penance or make a payment of seven female slaves.[355] This statement is the clearest example of Armagh's position on penance: it is limited in term and it can be negated through payment. This may go some way to answering the question of what kind of regime the penitents referred to earlier in the document underwent; a portion of them may have been at Armagh to endure a specific term of penance, while others may have taken to a quasi-monastic lifestyle.

Tírechán's Patrick, at some point during his mission, sends a letter of admonishment to two of his followers at Mag Aí who had ordained bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics

[352] *Liber Angeli*, §15.
[353] *Ibid.*, §16.
[354] 'Quo<n>dam itaque sanctus Patricius de Alti Mache urbe ad multitudines utriusque sexus humani generis babtizandus, docendas atque sanandas iuxta fontem in orientali praedictae urbis parte prope herentem pie perrexit', *ibid.*, §1. It should be noted that Bieler appears to omit part of the final section of this sentence ('prope herentem pie') from his translation, which may suggest that the saint was operating near a graveyard.
[355] *Ibid.*, §25. This reference to seven *ancillae* may be an indicator of the absorption of native customs into the Church, as, presumably, this is a Latin rendering of an Irish term *cumal*, 'female slave'. By the seventh century, it would appear that it had become a term of transaction rather than the actual transfer of slaves; Kelly, *Law*, pp. 112-113. In this light, we might read this passage as stating that the offender must pay the value of seven female slaves to Armagh.

without his counsel, such that they were 'moved to penance', went to their master at Armagh, and suffered the 'penance of monks'.[356] What this 'penance of monks' may have entailed is not revealed, but it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Tírechán's contemporary readers would have understood this as a penance of limited duration, as the demands often imposed upon monks in the various penitential texts discussed previously were corrective in nature, and not part of the routine of monastic life.[357] It would not appear that the two offenders were relieved of their positions, nor is it explicitly stated that they became monks; they may have returned to their churches once they had undergone their penitential correction. This episode is also the first instance in Tírechán's account where Patrick (implicitly) imposes penance, most likely serving as an illustration of his (or at least the presumption of his, and therefore Armagh's) authority over the bishops he had ordained himself and their successors.[358]

During his travels, Tírechán's Patrick miraculously raises the son of the son of Cass son of Glas from the dead.[359] This 120-foot-tall pagan, murdered a hundred years previously, thanks the saint for releasing him from his torment, even if only for an hour. The man accepts Patrick's God and is baptised, assured by the saint that he would not return to his previous unpleasant location. This incident is worthy of note as the men who murdered the grandson of Cass are described as the *fian* of the sons of Macc Con.[360] The only other reference to killing by Tírechán is as a demonstration of Patrick's power when his protection is violated. When a number of his foreign companions are killed by a son of Fíachu, son of Níall, Patrick's

[356] '… exierunt ad poenitentiam… et fecerunt poenitentiam monachorum…', Tírechán, [II 3] §6, pp. 122-123. Considering the various nuances of *poenitentiam*, we might consider that they were first moved to repentance, and then did penance at Armagh. Though we might assume that two figures in question, Caetiacus and Sachellus, were bishops, since they had the authority to ordain bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics, we are not told as much in this passage. Their episcopal status is noted in a list of bishops ordained by Patrick later in the text; Tírechán [III 1] §6 (2), pp. 128-129.

[357] If these figures were indeed bishops, they may have suffered comparatively long periods of penance, as penance was based on the rank of the individual under certain circumstances; for example, the punishment imposed for fornication was five years for a monk, but twelve for a bishop, *Paen. Columb.*, B §4; in the case of murder for the same grades, four and thirteen years respectively, *Dauid*, §7.

[358] The text claims that Patrick consecrated 450 bishops in Ireland during his career, and, though a list of the names of such figures is provided later in the same section, substantially fewer than that are recorded, terminating with a vague '...et alii quam plurimi'; Tírechán, [III 1] §6, pp. 126-127. Tírechán mentions penance twice in another passage, but neither references are relevant to the present work; *ibid*., [III 1] §26 (14) and (19), pp. 144-145. In the former, belief in penance after sin is demanded as part of the conversion process of two sisters who promptly die once receiving the eucharist for the first time; this brief mention of penance offers no hint as to what was expected of the penitent. In the latter example, a man is converted to *poenitentiam Dei* and his hair was shorn, which may indicate a rather more straight-forward case of the man becoming a monk and submitting to perfective penance.

[359] *Ibid*., [III 1] §40, pp. 154-155.

[360] 'Iugulauit me *fian maicc* Maicc Con in regno Coirpri Nioth Fer', *ibid*., [III 1] §40 (7), pp. 154-155.

response is to curse his progeny to be servants of their kin in perpetuity.[361] The message is simple: to cross Patrick is to cross Armagh, the repercussions of which could be politically devastating.

Muirchú relates an episode whereby Patrick imposes exile on the evil Macc Cuill moccu Greccae, a wicked and pagan ruler in the territory of the Ulaid who wore wicked emblems.[362] Macc Cuill attempted to trick and kill the saint, but was outfoxed, and submitted himself to Patrick's judgement for his crime. Patrick demands that he confess his sins and receive baptism, which Macc Cuill duly does. Stating that it is not for him to judge Macc Cuill's punishment, Patrick decides that he should surrender all of his property, go to the sea, chain himself to a boat, and, without oar or rudder, go wherever God chooses, all the while fasting and wearing only a simple garment, with the emblem of his sin upon his head.[363] Macc Cuill does as Patrick demands, and finds himself washed ashore on the island of Euonia (the Isle of Man), where he is taken in by the two bishops of the island, whom he eventually succeeds in office, having trained his body and soul according to their rule. It is important to note here that this wicked emblem-wearing, would-be killer is baptised before undertaking penitential exile.[364] This punishment for the intention to kill may appear to be unduly harsh, but the target of the crime was, on one level, not a simple layman but a saint, and on another level, the symbolic representative of contemporary Armagh; an attack on either was a transgression beyond compare.

Muirchú's work contains a distilled version of Patrick's *Epistola*, though it is stripped of much of its detail and it blames the British king Coractic (*i.e.*, Coroticus) for persecuting and killing Christians, not his soldiers.[365] Though admonished by Patrick, Coractic refused to change his ways, and was, as a result of Patrick's appeal to God, transformed into a fox. Why Muirchú would ignore the detail of Patrick's strongest criticism of violence towards the faithful is curious, as is his omission of the demand for excommunication and penance. Perhaps it was known that Patrick failed to bring the soldiers of Coroticus to justice. Not

[361] *Ibid.*, [III 1] §16 (4), pp. 136-137. These 'foreign companions' are referred to as *perigrini* in the text.
[362] '...et erat hic homo ualde impius saeuus tyrannus... mente crudelis... uita gentilis... signa sumens nequissima crudelitatis', Muirchú, I §23 (1-3), pp. 102-105.
[363] '…habens hoc insigne peccati tui in capite tuo…', *ibid*., I §23 (14), pp. 104-105.
[364] As noted previously, a fixed term of exile is demanded for the crime of killing by a cleric in Finnian's and Columbanus' Penitentials, while Cummian and the *Ambrosianum* demand permanent exile of all premeditated murders; see *Pen. Vinn*., §23, *Paen. Columb*., B §1, *Paen. Amb.*, IV §3, and *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §5. Permanent exile is also demanded by Adomnán of Iona for specific crimes of bloodshed, as shall be discussed in the next chapter.
[365] Muirchú, I §29, pp. 100-101.

unlike Tírechán's tale of the son of Fíachu, this is a demonstration of Patrick's power to punish those who defy his protection of others.

At the end of his *Life*, Muirchú states that Patrick, nearing the time of his death, was granted four requests by an angel, one of which was that whoever recited a hymn about Patrick at the moment of death would have the penance for their sins judged by the saint.[366] This may be an echo of a stipulation found in the *Notae suppletoriae*, which states that the Irish, thanks to Patrick, were granted three unique blessings, the first of which is that no Irishman would be imprisoned in Hell as long as he had undertaken penance, *poenitentiam agens*, even on the last day of his life.[367] Together these may imply that death-bed confession was still an issue in the Irish Church, and it is unclear if repentance or actual physical penance is to be understood in the latter, and indeed how one would undertake penance after death in the former. The positive result of penance in the *Notae*, escaping Hell, may suggest that penance was not widely undertaken, such that Armagh had to make the consequences of failure to comply with their teachings explicit. The text refers not to the monks and clergy of Armagh, nor a specific group of especially faithful layfolk, but to the Irish as a whole, which, aside from underling Armagh's claims to supremacy, would imply that penance was available to anyone who sought it. The direct appeal to the saint in Muirchú's work may also have been, like the Penitentials, an innovative attempt to solve the issue of death-bed confession; the fear of the individual expiring before completing confession and receiving absolution, and indeed the fact that they were escaping their duty to undergo penance, was spiritually circumnavigated by having Patrick judge and impose penance in the afterlife. Perhaps a primitive form of purgatory, this post-death penance may have served to not only offer succour to the dying, but to demonstrate Armagh's supremacy in matters spiritual.

[366] *Ibid.*, II §6 (1), pp. 116-117
[367] Tírechán, [III 2] §52, pp. 164-165. Bieler argues that Tírechán's authorship of this supplementary note is a 'distinct possibility', Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 44.

3.3 The Brigitine Tradition

3.3.1 The authors and their texts

Brigit is an enigmatic figure, a saint whose very existence has been a matter of debate. It has been suggested that the patron of Kildare may have been a pagan deity reformed by Christians, but the prevailing theory holds that there was a historical figure, a nun named Brigit, whose cult may have benefited from an association with the goddess of the same name.[368] Though the Annals disagree over the dates of her birth and death, it has been proposed that she was born in 439 and died in 524,[369] making her a young contemporary of Patrick. In any case, the historical existence of Brigit is not vital for the present work; whether she lived or not, the character of Brigit was celebrated in several Lives, and her cult flourished in Ireland, Britain, and on the Continent in the Middle Ages. In this light, we may consider that the attitudes contained within these works concerning penance and bloodshed reflect how those who wished to promote the cult of Brigit thought Christians ought to behave, how they should be punished, and how they might be redeemed.

Just as her existence is a matter of some debate, controversy surrounds the chronology of the earliest Lives of Brigit. These Lives are generally known as the *Vita Prima Brigidae*,[370] the *Vita Brigitae* of Cogitosus,[371] and the *Bethu Brigte*;[372] the first two are Latin compositions, while the third is approximately a quarter Latin, the majority of the work being in Old Irish.[373] Two competing theories have been proposed concerning the order of the composition of these works, one favouring the priority of the *Vita Prima* over Cogitosus, and

[368] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 186-187; K. Ritari, *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral theology in the Lives of Columba and Saint Brigit*, (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 18-19; D. A. Bray, 'Ireland's other apostle: Cogitosus' St Brigit', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 59 (2010), pp. 55-56
[369] This conclusion is based on the accuracy of entries found in the Iona Chronicle which were written by Columba, and an examination of annalistic evidence concerning various individuals mentioned in the *Vita Prima*; D. McCarthy, 'The chronology of Saint Brigit of Kildare', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), pp. 279-280.
[370] The Latin text used in the present work is *Vita I S. Brigidae*, *Acta Sanctorum, Feb. I*, pp. 119-134; translation by Sean Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 (1989), pp. 5-49. As with the Life by Cogitosus (see below), the division of chapters differs between the Latin and English texts; for clarity and consistency, I have adhered to the Latin divisions, though it is at times necessary to refer to the English. When referring to the Latin version of this text, *VP I* will be used; for the English translation, *VPB*.
[371] The Latin text employed was *Vita II Sanctae Brigitae, Acta Sanctorum, Feb. I*, pp. 135-141; translation by Jean-Michel Picard and Sean Connolly, 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit" Content and Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), pp. 5-27. *VP II* will be used when referring to the Latin version of this text, and *VB Cog*. for the English translation.
[372] Donnchadh Ó hAodha (ed.), *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 1-35.
[373] Richard Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*: the oldest texts', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 82-93.

the other the reverse. The two most influential papers concerning these hypotheses were both published in 1982 (and side-by-side in the same journal!). Sharpe proposed that the three surviving Lives of Brigit had drawn from an earlier lost work, which he called 'the Primitive Life', concluding that the *Vita Prima* preceded the *Vita Brigitae*.[374] Conversely, McCone suggested the reverse order of composition as a result of a slightly more complex approach involving the ecclesiastical and dynastic politics of rival kingdoms and churches within the territories of the Southern Uí Néill and the Laigin.[375] Sharpe argued that Cogitosus had the *Vita Prima* before him when writing his own work, borrowing heavily from it, though elaborating and clarifying events from the older text as he thought necessary.[376] He believed it to be the case that the borrower (*i.e.*, Cogitosus) was more likely to reduce overall detail and the number of episodes.[377] The sequence of events in Cogitosus has no geographical or chronological order, while the *Vita Prima* does, which Sharpe takes as further evidence that the hagiographer was selecting specific tales out of a greater body of work to suit his own purposes.[378] The *Bethu Brigte* is a close parallel to the *Vita Prima*, but, according to Sharpe, as the former preserves personal- and place-names, and certain other details which the latter omits, the Old-Irish work precedes the Latin.[379] Sharpe's model is then that there was a 'Primitive Life' of Brigit, now lost, to which the *Bethu Brigte* was closely related, followed by the *Vita Prima*, and, finally, Cogitosus' contribution.[380] As noted above, McCone argues for a different relationship between the texts.

McCone considers the *Vita Prima* to be a later composite of three separate texts which he identifies as having been originally composed by Ailerán of Clonard, Ultán of Dál Conchobair, and Cogitosus.[381] The (lost) works which McCone attributes to Ailerán and Ultán are concerned with eastern Mide and Tethbae, and Brega respectively.[382] Sometime later, and independently of his two predecessors, Cogitosus wrote his *Life of Brigit* at

[374] *Ibid*., pp. 94-96 and pp. 105-106.
[375] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', pp. 117-136.
[376] Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', pp. 91-92.
[377] *Ibid*., p. 91.
[378] *Ibid*., p. 92. The idea of there being a corpus of tales concerning a saint from which a hagiographer could pick and choose to build his narrative upon is supported by Adomnán's construction of the *Vita Columbae*. In the third book of the *Vita Columbae* we find that a later scribe, Dorbbéne, inserted a prophecy by the founder of Iona taken from the book of Cumméne the White, leaving us to wonder what else may have been omitted by Adomnán in his shaping of the character of Columba; *VC*, III 5. Cogitosus also admits to there being a wider body of tales associated with his patron; *VB II*, §2 and §40.
[379] Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', pp. 94-95.
[380] *Ibid*,, p. 96.
[381] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', pp. 134-135
[382] *Ibid*.

Kildare.[383] McCone connects these works with the political aspirations of the ruling dynasties of these regions as a means of establishing a rough chronology. The first text would seem to be associated with the Uí Cairbre, who were a powerful faction in the sixth century, but in decline by the following one, reduced to two small kingdoms around Granard and Clonard, home of Ailerán.[384] The second element of the *Vita Prima* is hostile towards this dynasty, betraying its origins in the rival the territories of the Síl nÁedo Sláine.[385] McCone places both of these texts in the first half of the seventh century.[386] During the seventh century the Uí Dúnlainge succeeded in becoming kings of Ailenn, and several members of the family became abbots of Kildare,[387] the establishment for which Cogitosus wrote, providing us with the third strand. According to McCone, all three of these Lives were used in the construction of the composite *Vita Prima*.[388] The *Bethu Brigte*, the latest of the three surviving texts in McCone's system, descends from Ailerán's composition via another lost Latin *Life*.[389]

Of the three extant Lives, only one can be dated with any security; 650x690 is suggested as the period during which Cogitosus composed his *Vita Brigitae*.[390] This date is not based on any internal evidence, nor on any knowledge of Cogitosus' own life, but rather on a reference to him in Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*: here Muirchú calls Cogitosus his *pater*, and states that, in composing a *Life* of Patrick, he is following the example of the Kildareman. [391] As Muirchú completed his work before 700 (see above), Cogitosus must have finished his *Life of Brigit* some time before then.[392] On one point McCone and Sharpe agree: the *Bethu Brigte* and at least part of the *Vita Prima* derive ultimately from the same source,[393] and the former (the *Bethu Brigte*) can be dated to the ninth century.[394] Considering that we have only one securely dateable text, it is easy to see how two opposing theories on the chronology of the other texts might arise. While Sharpe is cautious in assigning authorship to his

[383] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[384] *Ibid*., p. 134.
[385] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[386] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[387] Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 151-152; and McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', p. 136.
[388] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', pp. 135-136.
[389] *Ibid*., pp. 126-126, and p.136.
[390] Connolly offers c.650 in Connolly, S., and Picard, J.-M., 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit"', p. 5, but in a later article provides a more specific range of 650x675, but without any indication as to why, see Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 6.
[391] '...patris mei Coguitosi', Muirchú, <*Prologus*> (2).
[392] As noted above, Connolly tentatively suggests that Cogitosus must have composed his work around 650; see n. 390.
[393] Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', pp. 93-96, and McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', p. 125.
[394] Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', p. 93, and McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', p. 121.

conjectured 'Primitive Life' to Ultán, or the *Vita Prima* to Ailerán,[395] his model requires the existence of only one lost text, where McCone's model demands two, which he confidently ascribes to Ailerán and Ultán, independent of the *Vita Prima*.[396]

What, then, are we to make of the relationship between Cogitosus and the *Vita Prima*? McCarthy adds annalistic evidence to Sharpe's linguistic argument,[397] which is supported by Howlett on structural and stylistic features,[398] and Charles-Edwards states that there are 'powerful' lines of reasoning to believe the priority of the *Vita Prima*.[399] Ó hAodha holds that the seventh-century *Life* by Cogitosus is earliest, followed by the eighth-century source of the *Bethu Brigte* and the *Vita Prima*, both of which he dates to the ninth century.[400] Swift concurs that Cogitosus wrote the earliest surviving *Life of Brigit*,[401] and Stancliffe has argued that part of the *Vita Prima* (which she dates to between *c*.670 and 785) depends on Cogitosus, and that the early section of the *Vita Prima* and the *Bethu Brigte* share a common source.[402] As noted above, McCone's arguments in relation to the political climates that gave rise to the various Lives fit the political profile of the various elements which make up the composite text of the *Vita Prima*. Connolly cautiously dismisses Sharpe, but remains hesitant in agreeing fully with McCone,[403] admitting that all that can be said for certain is that Cogitosus wrote his work first, but that it and the *Vita Prima* share a common source.[404] If we follow Connolly's argument, we arrive at a compromise between Sharpe and McCone: the latter's chronology is broadly accepted, but the former's requirement for Cogitosus' dependence on a lost source is recognised. Considering the structure of the *Vita Prima*, it would also seem unlikely that Cogitosus would borrow accurately from only specific sections of the text while ignoring the rest,[405] a more likely scenario being that it was the compiler of the *Vita Prima* who made use

[395] Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', p. 101.
[396] McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', pp. 134-136.
[397] D. McCarthy, 'The chronology of St Brigit of Kildare', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), p. 280.
[398] David Howlett, 'Vita I Sanctae Brigitae', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), pp. 21-22.
[399] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints' Cults and their Constituencies', *Ériu*, 54 (2004), p. 82.
[400] Ó hAodha, *Bethu Brigte*, pp. xxiv-xxvii.
[401] Catherine Swift, 'Brigid, Patrick and the kings of Kildare AD 640-850', in W. Nolan and T. McGrath (eds.), *Kildare: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006), p. 100.
[402] Clare Stancliffe, 'The miracle stories in seventh-century Irish saints' lives', in J. Fontaine, and J. N. Hillgarth (eds.), *The seventh century change and continuity : proceedings of a joint French and British colloquium held at the Warburg Institute 8-9 July 1988* (London, 1992), p. 88, n.3.
[403] Connolly notes that Cogitosus precedes the *Vita Prima* by a century in a priority of composition, which he bases on McCone's 'ecceliastico-political' arguments; see Connolly, 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit"', p. 5, and *idem*, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 5.
[404] Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 6.
[405] As Connolly notes, §§97-111 and §§123-129 of the *Vita Prima* bear a strong resemblance (and, in some cases, are identical to) Cogitosus' *Vita Brigitae*, while only ten sections of the remainder of the text hold even a passing similarity to the Kildareman's work; see Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 6-7.

of either Cogitosus' work or a lost common source. As Connolly concludes, the *Vita Prima* appears to be a composite work constructed in the middle of the eight century, elements of which draw from the same sources as Cogitosus' seventh-century composition (or perhaps Cogitosus himself), and those of the ninth-century *Bethu Brigte*, but these ultimate sources are not necessarily the same.[406] The *Vita Prima*, as it now stands, is at once both newer and older than Cogitosus' *Life*: the compiling of the *Vita Prima* took place after the acolyte of Kildare had written his work, and some of its elements might indeed precede his efforts, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that the anonymous compiler (or indeed those from whom he copied) shaped or altered the tales of Brigit to suit his own designs.

The *Bethu Brigte* roughly aligns with *Vita Prima* §§1-43; the order of episodes is near identical, though the *Vita Prima* contains two paragraphs which are not found in the *Bethu Brigte*, and the latter contains eleven which are not found in the former.[407] Connolly holds that this relationship points to a dependence on a common source, agreeing with McCone's ascription to Ailerán.[408] The second source of the *Vita Prima*, which provides §§44-97 and §§113-122, is attributed to Ultán, again following McCone's arguments.[409] The *Vita Prima* and Cogitosus share thirty-one or thirty-two sections, though in some cases the connection is tenuous.[410] These sections overlap in such a fashion that the 'Ailerán' element of the *Vita Prima* equates to four episodes in Cogitosus, and the 'Ultán' component to seven.[411] The remaining twenty-one sections of Cogitosus which are also found in the *Vita Prima* appear to be independent of 'Ailerán' or 'Ultán', which suggests that the compiler of the text either drew the tales from the *Vita Brigitae*, or from another unknown source which Cogitosus also had before him. The overlap between the 'Ailerán' and 'Ultán' elements with Cogitosus'

[406] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.
[407] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[408] *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.
[409] *Ibid.*, p. 7. Connolly omits to ascribe §112 to his 'Ultán' section, which it must belong to as no correlation is found in Cogitosus and the 'Ailerán' contribution is limited to §1-43, unless we are to presume a fourth source for this single section.
[410] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[411] The contribution of 'Ailerán' to the *Vita Prima* (§§1-43) that maps on to Cogitosus is as follows: *VPB* §14 = *VB Cog.* [3], §16 = [1], §19-20 = [2], and §30 = [27]. For 'Ultán': §45 = [16], §50 = [17], §51 = [15], §67 = [22], §91 = [6], and §122 = [24]. These series are taken from Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 7. I would not include §19-20 = [2] and §30 = [27] as the similarity is so slight as to be irrelevant. The only passage which is distinctly similar is §14 = [3]. While the remainder bear a passing resemblance in setting, they rarely agree on the message of Brigit's actions. Such discrepancies might suggest Cogitosus' (or indeed the compiler of the *Vita Prima*'s) shaping of Brigit's character and deeds, but also that he was drawing from a body of tales that were also used by previous editors, rather than directly copying or amending their versions. With this in mind, and considering the fact that the *Vita Prima* is a composite text, we have no way of discerning how much of it has been altered between the composition of the original elements and their gathering together into a single unit; as such, I hesitate to ascribe any certain authorship to the non-Cogitosus sections, but, for the sake of convenience and clarity, will refer to them as 'Ailerán' and 'Ultán'.

composition may be explained by all three drawing from the same lost source, or by those episodes being part of a common Brigitine tradition, and not necessarily evidence of the latter borrowing from the former two, as Cogitosus himself admits that he has not recounted all the miracles performed by his patron.[412]

3.3.2 Penance and bloodshed in the Brigitine tradition

The Brigitine *Vitae*, in comparison to the Patrician texts, offer quite a few varied examples of bloodshed, but, in terms of penance, there is some uncertainty, based largely on the manner of translation. In the *Vita Prima* we find variations of the phrase *poenitentiam agere* used in ten passages,[413] *poeniteo* in two,[414] and *ad poenitentiam* in one,[415] only one of which Connolly translates in the sense of the act 'to do penance',[416] preferring instead to use the thought or mental process of 'repentance'. Given the ambiguity of *poenitentiam agere*, one might first agree with Connolly's preference for 'repent', yet, considering the fact that he himself translated the phrase in terms of 'doing penance' on one occasion, there is a case to be made for deed rather than thought in several situations (as we shall see presently). Coupled with Bieler's decision to translate the same phase in the Irish Penitentials consistently as 'to do penance', I would argue that, in certain contexts, it is action for the remittance of, not

[412] *VB II*, §2 and §40.
[413] *VB I*, §30, §36, §43, §55, §65, §72, §74, §77, §91, and §106.
[414] *Ibid.*, §36 and §72. The first instance concerns an assembly of bishops at Tailtiu, during which Brigit resolves the question of the paternity of a certain child. First the saint attempts to compel the woman to reveal the truth by making her tongue swell, but she does not repent, 'sed nec illa poenituit'; Brigit then blesses the tongue of the child, and it is miraculously able to inform the assembly that the accused Bishop Brón is not in fact the father, at which point the (former) virgin submits to penance, 'mulier poenitentiam egit'; *VB I*, §36. The *Bethu Brigte* adds some minor details to the story, such as that, when the true father is revealed, the assembly demands that the woman be burned, yet Brigit refuses this course of action, and commands that the woman do penance, 'Haec agat poenitentiam'; *BB*, §40. The logic here may be that the women does not repent in the first instance in the sense of not consenting to reveal the truth, but is then compelled to undertake some form of penance when the facts are revealed. In the second case, a layman, his wife, and his daughters settle on an island on which an anchorite lives. The anchorite has taken a vow to never look upon a woman's face, and when he fails to convince the man to remove his wife (making no mention of the daughters!), he seeks Brigit's aid, but she too fails to prevail. One day an eagle snatches the baby of the family, and the mother comes to Brigit weeping and wailing, only to be told by the saint that the child is safe on a certain beach. The wife finds the child, and repents to Brigit, '...et sic invenit infantem, venitque ad Brigidam, et poenituit'; the husband, however, remains obstinate, until one day, while on the shore, a sudden wind seizes him, carrying him to a nearby port. The layman becomes contrite in his heart and does penance, 'Tunc ille laicus compunctus corde poenitentiam egit'; *VB I*, §72. Here the sense is more ambiguous, but the fact that the feeling of contrition occurs first may imply that a penitential deed is to be understood as the outcome of the scenario.
[415] *VB I*, §100.
[416] '...et in illis diebus ipse penitentiam egit...', *VB I*, §77 = *VPB*, §77.

reflection on, sin that is being expressed with this phrase. Both instances of *poenitere* are followed by forms of *poenitentiam agere*, which may suggest that the author is separating 'to repent' from 'to do penance'.[417] The final term, *ad poenitentiam*, does not make sense as Connolly has translated it: a woman who took a vow of integrity, and then fell into sin, is restored to 'repentance' (according to Connolly) by Brigit after she had already made her sin known to the saint. In several penitential texts we find reference to 'virgins', that is, female counterparts to monks,[418] who, in other words, would have been women who took a vow of integrity. Surely here it is more plausible to suggest that this woman was restored to the permanent monastic form of penance to which she had vowed herself, rather than simple repentance. Of the seven remaining examples of *poenitentiam agere*, the contextual circumstances in which the phrase is found lends, I would argue, a sense of the act of penance in all but two situations, where repentance in the sense of the admission of fault is most reasonable,[419] though such repentance may have led to actual penance.

In contrast to the Patrician texts, where our hero frequently confronts a pagan world populated by kings and druids to convert or punish, and rarely meets other Christians, the Brigitine Lives are set in a land that is not only thoroughly Christian but heavily populated by monks, virgins, hermits, and penitents, and, most remarkably, kings, warriors, and laymen who submit to penance. Penance plays an interesting role in this environment, though it is never revealed what the process of penance actually entailed. It is clear, however, that anyone Brigit meets on her journeys, as depicted in the *Vita Prima*, could undertake penance, from a young man who is attempting literally to run to the kingdom of God[420] to a cruel mistress.[421]

---

[417] See n. 414 above.

[418] The femininity of 'virgins' is explicit in *Synodus Pat.*, §9 and §17, and is implied in *Dauid* § 11, *Paen. Cumm.*, II §17, and *Synodus Pat.*, §18.

[419] In the first case, Brigit freezes the hands of quarrelling lepers until they repent. Remarkably, Brigit did not heal them of their leprosy, an oversight which is 'corrected' in the version of the same episode reported in the Old Irish Life, an account which does not simply record that the lepers 'repented' as the Latin text does, but has Brigit directly command the two, '*Agite penitentiam*', and they duly comply; compare *VB I*, §30 and *BB*, §34. Patrick also performed a miracle which impeded the hands of two brothers as he feared that they would harm one another in a dispute over their inheritance which had escalated into armed combat. No penance is imposed, but the lands and chattels of the inheritance was given to Patrick, and a church was founded; Tírechán, [III 1] §32, pp. 148-149. The second example involves a young girl who ran away from her home on the night of her marriage in an effort to preserve her virginity for Christ, seeking refuge with Brigit. Her father chases after her the following morning, but he and his horsemen are all brought to a standstill when the saint traces the sign of the cross on the ground. The father eventually relents, repents, and is released, as is the girl from her 'earthly spouse'; '…poenitentiam egit …et sic puella liberata a carnali sponso', *VB I*, §106. Such a sequence of events suggests that the father relented to Brigit's will rather than undertaking penance.

[420] *VB I*, §77. It is left unsaid how or why this man undertook penance, only that it took an unspecified number of days, and Brigit does not seem to play an active role in the process; she is not described as his confessor, or as imposing penance upon him. The fact that 'in those days' this man 'did penance', 'in illis diebus ipse poenitentiam egit', seems to be suggestive of an active process, of something more demanding than, or in

Encounters with thieves also seem to be a relatively common,[422] one of which hints at the presence of penitents at Kildare. Brigit also makes a habit of saving men from execution,[423] and in doing so compels one king to (perhaps) suffer penance.[424] Brigit acts as confessor to a sinful nun[425] and a nobleman,[426] and her position as a figure of authority is demonstrated

---

addition to, repentance. Indeed, this is the only passage where Connolly translates this phrase in terms of 'doing penance'; see n. 416 above.

[421] *VB I*, §74. While living in Munster, Brigit and her nuns travel to Mag Cliach where they encounter a maidservant who has run away from her mistress, only to have been caught. Brigit asks the mistress to release the woman, but she refuses, dragging her away violently. The right hand of the mistress, with which she was dragging the maid, suddenly withers; she weeps and repents, '...flevit, et poenitentiam egit'. Upon letting the girl go free, the mistress' hand is healed by Brigit. While the sense of 'poenitentiam egit', in terms of the difference between repenting and doing penance, is more ambiguous here, the shedding of tears is an act of penance in itself, a demonstration of repentance (or perhaps the result of the shock or the pain of a hand suddenly withered).

[422] Brigit twice encounters thieves whom she compels to penance. On one occasion, a family joins Brigit at Kildare for a celebration, leaving their property unguarded, and providing the opportunity for some thieves to steal their cattle. The thieves escape, but their flight is impeded by a swollen river, across which they attempt to drive the animals. The cattle, to which the thieves had tied their clothes and arms, instead flee across Mag Life to Kildare, with the men chasing after them. Upon their arrival they are recognised as thieves, and they surrender themselves and agree to do penance in the presence of Brigit and her city, '...poenitentiam egerunt apud S. Brigidam in sua civitate', *VB I*, §43. While the sense of 'repentance' is possible in this scenario, it seems more likely that, since the thieves are taken to Brigit's 'city', penance is expected of them. This may be indicative of the public confession of a public crime which was then atoned for accordingly. *VB II*, §19 bears some resemblance to this episode, yet it does not make any reference to repentance or penance, and the thieves are conveniently swept away by the river. Brigit encounters thieves once more at her church at Mag Inis, near Patrick's dwelling-place. These men steal the four horses by which Brigit and her nuns had travelled to the site, and then proceeded to steal fifty bushels of corn from a nearby house. The thieves mistakenly return to Brigit's establishment, believing it to be their own home, and in the morning they are confronted by Brigit and the owner of the grain. She sends for Patrick, who soon arrives and the thieves are released and 'poenitentiam egerunt'; *VB I*, §55. This act of deference to Patrick may be an indication of the limits of Brigit's jurisdiction as set out in *Liber Angeli*, §32. Here it may be the case that the thieves did indeed simply repent, but penance may also have been expected of them, especially as they are brought before a bishop.

[423] *VB I*, §26 = *BB*, §30; *VB I*, §106; and *VB I*, §110 = *VB II*, §23.

[424] Brigit travels to the king of Mag Breg to secure the release of a man, but the king refuses, stating that the man will be executed that very day. Brigit manages to convince the king to stay the execution for one day, but some of the king's company, fearing the saint will free the man, plan to seize and kill him that night. The prisoner has a vision of Brigit, which tells him to call out the saint's name repeatedly while he is being dragged to his death, and, when the chain is removed from his neck, to turn to the right where he will see her waiting. The illusory death occurs; the men think that they behead the man, but he had in fact escaped with Brigit. The following day no head or gore were to be seen, and when Brigit asked the king to free the man, he realised what she had accomplished, released the man, and did penance (though, given the lack of detail, it is also possible that the king merely repented his ways), 'Rex vero audiens haec, poenitentiam egit'; *VB I*, §65.

[425] Brigit's pupil Darlugdach had a tryst with a young man, but, out of fear for God and Brigit, she burned her feet with coals to expel her desire. The young virgin confesses her sin to Brigit, who commends her on her perseverance to stay true to God, and then heals her feet. Brigit does not punish Darlugdach, accepting the pain the girl put herself through as sufficient purgative affliction to expiate her sinful thoughts; *VB I*, §96. Darlugdach is named by Brigit as her successor, whom she predicts will die one year after her own death, such that they would share the same feast day; *VB I*, §113. This death of the successor on the same day as the founder saint is echoed at Iona where Baithéne and Columba share the same feast day: *VC*, II 45. Darlugdach is associated with the founding of a church to St Brigit at Abernethy by a Pictish King Nechtan, who, tradition holds, visited Brigit while in exile from his own kingdom, but such connections appear to be the invention of later generations; see Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 92-96.

[426] A high-born man contrives an elaborate plot to compel a woman to have sex with him, but through a miracle his deceit is revealed, and he confesses his sin to the saint. Whether or not he was to suffer penance is left unsaid, but it is made explicit that, in Cogitosus' mind at least, Brigit could hear confession; *VB II*, §28. Connolly suggests a relationship between this passage (*VB II*, §28 = *VB Cog*., §25) and *VB I*, §103 = *VPB*, §109;

when an anchorite seeks her aid in a land dispute.[427] Penitential fasting is noted,[428] as is penitential weeping and episcopal oversight of penance.[429]

On matters of penance, the Brigit of the *Vita Prima* never explicitly demands atonement from any of the sinful people she meets; a miracle reveals their fault, some are inspired to confess, and others to do penance or repent. The saint does not play a very active role in the composite *Life*, she is merely a conduit for God, and is most often simply present at the resolution of a misdeed or the expiation of a sin. By comparison, the Brigit of the *Bethu Brigte* twice actively commands that an individual do penance, and the Brigit of Cogitosus hears confession. We might see in this a reflection of the territorial considerations that McCone suggests influenced each composition:[430] the Laigin saint of the *Bethu Brigte* and Cogitosus is confident and independent, while the Uí Néill holy woman of the *Vita Prima* is passive, especially when in the presence of Patrick. The only occasion in the *Vita Prima* in which an individual is explicitly compelled to do penance it is a bishop who commands it, not Brigit. This subservience to a bishop may have been an attempt to dilute Cogitosus' claim that Brigit, and her successor abbesses at Kildare, were equal in rank to the bishops of that establishment.[431] In any event, references to penitential acts such as fear, trembling, fasting,

---

Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*', p. 7. Such a relationship is tenuous at best as the overall plot and conclusion are very different. What is most interesting is that, unlike the preceding example (see n. 425 above), this is a depiction of Brigit as the confessor of a layman; Darlugdach is a virgin and Brigit is her superior, and so it would be expected that Brigit could hear her confession, but, in this second example, the man has, apparently, no such relationship to the saint, such that she appears to be operating in a fashion not unlike a bishop, a rank which she held according to *BB* §19.

[427] See above, n. 414.

[428] While Brigit and several of her nuns are living in Munster near the church of Bishop Erc, an anchorite and several of his companions pass by on a journey to an island They discuss seeking Brigit's blessing while resting on the road, but the anchorite reminds them of his vow never to look upon a woman's face, so they continue on their way, forgetting to take their baggage with them. When they arrive at a hospice they notice their mistake, and decide that their failure to seek Brigit's blessing is the source of their troubles. They fast that night in order to make amends for this oversight, '...et pro hac culpa in hac nocte jejunabimus', and their belongings are returned to them by Brigit's nuns the following day; *VB I*, §71.

[429] During a religious service at Mag Aí, Brigit refuses to drink from a chalice upon seeing a vision of a monster and the outline of a goat within it. The bishop demands confession of the attendant holding the chalice, who immediately admits to stealing and killing a goat, and eating part of it. The bishop insists that he 'repents' and shed tears of sorrow. The attendant obeys, and when Brigit gazes into the chalice a second time she no longer sees the goat as 'the tears had atoned for the fault', 'Lacrymae enim illius culpam solverunt'; *VB I*, §91. This is one of the occasions where the sequence of events suggests that penance was demanded, especially as the shedding of tears was a form of penance, a physical demonstration of true repentance: 'Dixitque ei Episcopus: Poenitentiam age... Et jussis obedivit et egit poenitenitam'; compare *VB I*, §91 and *VPB*, §92. A similar miracle is noted earlier in the text, this time by a young virgin in the house of a holy virgin named Brigit; *VB I*, §27. The young virgin is caused to tremble with fear when her sin is revealed; though not explicitly an act of penance, this image does have penitential undertones. The *Bethu Brigte* adds a minor detail to this account, that the pious virgin ('ógh craibdech') who summoned Brigit is named Bríg, daughter of Coimloch; *BB*, §31. The shedding of tears is explicitly noted by Cummian as a means to the remission of sin; *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus* §5.

[430] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', pp. 117-136.

[431] *VB II*, §2.

and weeping are noted.[432] Fasting for the expiation of sin is found throughout the Irish Penitentials. Weeping as a path to atonement is noted only on a few occasions in these texts,[433] and is also mentioned in the *Life* of Columba.[434] Nonetheless, given the disparate geographic regions in which the various penitential texts and Lives were composed, it would appear to be the case that the shedding of tears was a widely accepted penitential practice in the Irish Church. Such a common tradition presumably traces its origins to the 'baptism of tears' advocated by Gregory of Nazianzen, which made its way into the writings of Cassian and Caesarius.[435]

In comparison to the Patrician Lives, the Brigitine tradition appears to be highly concerned with repentance and penance, especially so if the revision of Connolly's translation of certain terms is accepted. This may be indicative of a certain historical sensitivity on behalf of the authors (Patrick was operating in a pagan landscape, and though Brigit was born into one, she rarely interacts with non-Christians after taking the veil), or differing priorities in the purposes of the texts; Muirchú and Tírechán seem to be more keen on stamping Patrick's episcopal authority on the land, while the Brigitine writers are, in some respects, more focused on her pastoral activities, from aiding the weak to helping bishops and overseeing virgins. This notion, that penance is to be understood rather than repentance, while important in its own right in terms of the provision of pastoral care for the Irish laity, is also an important factor in terms of the Brigitine perspective on violence and bloodshed, and how a layman can atone for such deeds.

Brigit, over the course of her three Lives, appears to have had complicated relationships with bloodshed, at times condoning, and, at others, condemning it. The permanence of Brigit's patronage, particularly when bloodshed is a possibility, is noted in a miracle concerning her family home. While the saint is staying with her father, Dubthach, an angel informs her that enemies approach, that she must warn the household and evacuate the house as it will be burnt.[436] After this event transpires, Dubthach gives thanks to Brigit, and she states that no blood will ever be shed in his home. This has, according to the composer of the tale, held true until the present day; he even recounts a failed assault against a virgin on

[432] For example, *VB I*, §27, §50, §74, §91, and §93.
[433] *Pen. Vinn.*, §8, §12, and §29; *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus* §5; *Paen. Bi*., V §1.2; and '*Synodus II S. Patricii*', in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 184-197, III.
[434] *VC*, I 30.
[435] O'Loughlin, 'Penitentials and pastoral care', p. 97.
[436] *VB I*, §86. This passage is followed by one in which Brigit's nuns inquire about her angelic aid: *VB I*, §87. Connolly combines these two passages into one: *VPB*, §87.

the premises, a point which may indicate that a site which was understood to have been Dubthach's home had become a religious house dedicated to the saint. While Brigit's protection extends to an innocent virgin, the defence of her father, a sword-wielding warrior as we shall soon see, appears to rest purely on kinship and not on pious merit. This may have served to underline the idea that Brigit would always protect her family, her kin, and her ecclesiastical *familia*. Such valuable and effective (as the unsuccessful assault would attest) patronage was not limited to a spiritual shield, but also, apparently, to the sword.

In an episode following the miraculous escape from his enemies, Dubthach asks Brigit to go to the king of the Laigin to ask that he be given permanent ownership of a sword that had only been granted temporarily.[437] On her way to the king she is met by a servant who beseeches her to gain his release from the service of that same king. When Brigit asks the king for these things, he enquires as to what she can offer in return. The saint promises him eternal life and that his descendants will be kings forever. The king responds that he has no need for what he cannot see and that he has no concern for those who succeed him; he wishes only for a long life and to be ever victorious. Brigit consents to the king's terms, and he concedes to her requests. When next he was about to engage in battle, the king implores his men to pray to the saint. Brigit appears on the battlefield before them, staff in hand and a column of fire rising from her head,[438] and they successfully rout the enemy. The king wins thirty battles after that, wages nine victorious campaigns in Britain, and, as he was invincible, is offered rewards by many to fight on their side. Upon his death, the Uí Néill, the king's perennial enemies, gather to devastate the Laigin. The Laigin go into battle with the dead king's body in a chariot and defeat the invaders. Though primarily a demonstration of the power of Brigit's patronage, this episode also illustrates the tacit acceptance of bloodshed by at least one Brigitine tradition (one that is hostile towards the Uí Néill and supportive of the Laigin, pointing to the regional origin of the tale). It is curious that the king is left anonymous, and that he sacrificed remarkably little to secure such abundant favour, which may indicate that the episode was designed to imply that any king of the Laigin might be granted Brigit's protection, especially when fighting in defiance of the hated Uí Néill.

[437] *VB I*, §88. Connolly divides this into two passages, *VPB*, §88 and §89; the former concerns the deal between the king and the saint, and the latter the events that occur after his death.
[438] 'Tunc statim Rex vidit S. Brigidam praeire ante se cum baculo suo in manu dextra et columna ignis ardebat de capite eius usque ad coelum', *ibid*.

The *Vita Prima* contains seven successive, and surprisingly violent, episodes concerning bloodshed.[439] The first involves an interesting speech by Brigit. The wife of King Conall's son travels to Brigit in the hope the saint would pray that she might bear a son.[440] Brigit refuses to meet the woman, and when a nun asks her why she often prays for the wives of common folk to have sons but will not do so for queen, Brigit responds that 'In truth, the sons of kings are serpents, and sons of blood, and sons of death, apart from a small number chosen by God'.[441] Brigit, however, yields, and agrees to pray for the queen, but she foresees that her offspring will be cursed and shed blood, but, seemingly, this will be a successful dynasty.[442] The reference to 'sons of death' is interesting as these individuals were considered to be outside the Christian community, youths acting as roving brigands or warrior-bands, who could in later life become accepted members of society.[443] Curiously, despite her condemnation, the Brigit of the *Vita Prima* will go on to support certain 'sons of death'.

In the first of a series of miracles related to Conall, son of Niall Noígiallach, Brigit saves both him and his brother Cairpre from murdering each other. While walking along a rood, Brigit meets Conall, who fears that his brother Cairpre wishes to kill him; not long after, the saint meets Cairpre, who holds the same fear of Conall.[444] As the two men cross a certain hill, they miraculously do not recognise one another, embrace, and are blessed by

[439] *VB I*, §60 and §§62-67.
[440] '...uxor filii Conalli regis...', *ibid*., §60. This Conall is most likely Conall Cremthainne, the ancestor of both the Síl nÁedo Sláine and the Clann Cholmáin, two of the great dynasties of the Southern Uí Néill; see Byrne, *Kings*, p. 90. McCone argues that great favour Brigit shows Conall in §§60-65 of the *Vita Prima* confirms Ultán's authorship; McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', p. 135. It is interesting to note that Conall had two sons, one of whom both the previously mentioned dynasties trace their ancestry through: Fergus Cerrbél. If we take that it is this son of Conall whose wife is imploring Brigit to pray on her behalf, we may be offered some insight as to why Brigit was so adamant in her refusal to do so, as the product of her efforts may have been understood by contemporary readers to have been the infamous high-king Diarmait mac Cerbaill. Diarmait earned the ire of many saints, including Columba, for a variety of reasons, one of which was his apparent association with paganism; see Byrne, *Kings*, p. 90, pp. 94-99, and pp. 109-111. If it is indeed the case that we are to understand that the saint's prayers would lead to the conception of the future high-king, it neatly explains why the author is reluctant to associate Brigit with such a figure while admitting that he will be successful in gaining and maintaining power. This hypothetical relationship may clarify (and indeed eliminate the need for) Connolly's suggested inclusion of a negation in reference to long dominance of this king; *VPB*, §62.
[441] 'Filii vero Regum serpentes sunt, et filii sanguinum, filiique mortis, excerptis paucis electis a Deo', *VB I*, §60.
[442] As noted above, Connolly suggests the omission of a negative here; compare *VB I*, §60 and *VPB*, §62.
[443] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 299-300. These 'sons of death' will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.
[444] *VB I*, §62. These two figures were the respective ancestors of the rival dynasties of the Uí Chairpre and Síl nÁedo Sláine; McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', p. 135. These two brothers also feature in one of Patrick's *Lives* (also influenced by Ultán), yet the outcome is not one of peace-keeping. Patrick calls Cairpre, who intended to kill the saint and had his servants scourged, an enemy of God, stating that there will be no king of his lineage, and dooms his descendants to serve those of his brother. Conall, on the other hand, is baptised by Patrick, who secures his throne for eternity; Tírechán, [III 1] §9-10, pp. 132-133.

Brigit. One might see this as evidence of Brigit adopting the role of peace-maker,[445] but, considering her relationship with Conall and that the brothers were simply deceived about the presence of one other, it may be that the author had several intentions in mind, once of which was to have the saint save her preferred king from the grievous crime of *fingal*, 'kin-slaying'.[446]

Conall once again approaches Brigit for a blessing to aid him in killing his enemies.[447] He and his companions are wearing sinister amulets,[448] and are compelled to complete this murderous deed to free themselves from their bonds. Brigit blesses them, praying that they are neither harmed nor do harm, and that they will lay aside their evil amulets.[449] The men continue on to the lands of the Cruithin,[450] burn a fort, and apparently slaughter many people before returning home with the heads of their enemies to a joyous welcome. The next morning they awake and find no heads, nor gore or blood on their weapons and clothes. Conall dispatches emissaries to the fort he had sought to raid, but they find the people within alive, unharmed, and rather puzzled by seeing the stubble of their fields burnt, the fort demolished, and large stones uprooted.[451] Understanding now the power of the saint, Conall and his men lay down their amulets,[452] which pleases Brigit, who promises that she will protect him from all danger. This gift later proves useful when Conall invades another territory, where he inflicts a great slaughter, before taking rest at a fort. His comrades fear a

[445] This episode may be a commentary on later events, considering that Diarmait mac Cerbaill, grandson of Conall, succeeded to the high-kingship after Tuathal Máelgarb, grandson of Cairpre and reigning high-king, was killed in battle by Diarmait's half- or foster-brother, Máel Mór, leading to the enduring dominance of Diarmait's descendants over the Southern Uí Néill; see Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 90-91, and AU 544.1 and AT 543.1 (corrected to 548; see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 98). In this light, Brigit's miracle may be seen as evidence of a begrudging truce between two competing factions by the time of the composition of the *Vita*.
[446] On the severity of the crime of kin-slaying in secular law, see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 127-128.
[447] *VB I*, §§63-64. While Conall is noted as being a king in *VB I*, §60, he is not referred to as holding such a rank in the following sections, which might be to be expected as one cannot dismiss the possibility of the episodes occurring out of chronological order, not least because of the composite nature of the *Vita Prima*; indeed, this latter point is underlined by the fact that the Conall-related series of episodes is interrupted by an unrelated event; *ibid*., §61. That said, since the *Vita Prima* apparently follows the sequence of Brigit's life from birth to death, and compiler of the *Vita Prima* placed these passages in this particular order, it may be the case that the reader is to understand Conall as being a king in the subsequent passages. Furthermore, the miracle story that immediately follows Brigit's protection of Conall concerns a king of Mag Breg, who may have been Conall rendered anonymous for fear of the unseemly association of the king with Brigit's disfavour; compare *VB I*, §§64-65, and see below, n. 457. Bookending this series of miracles with references to Conall as king (one of which was perhaps edited later) would be strongly suggestive of the author's intent that the reader should understand Conall as king. The fact remains, however, that the *Vita Prima* is a composite text which shows clear signs of editing, and so one cannot be sure of the original sequence of miracles.
[448] '...stigmantibus malignis...', *ibid*., §63.
[449] '...ut ista signa diaboli deponatis...', *ibid*.
[450] The Cruithin were a population-group based in the north-east of Ireland who provided many of the over-kings of the Ulaid; see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 54.
[451] *VB I*, §64. Connolly combines this passage with the previous; *VPB*, §65.
[452] The amulets are twice referred to as *stigmata* in this section; *VB I*, §64.

counter-attack, but Conall places his faith in Brigit. That night his enemies send four men to investigate the fort, but they see only clerics examining books, not warriors with the heads of their enemies at their feet. Three more spies are sent, yet they return with the same report, and the enemy host departs. Learning of this, Conall gives thanks to Brigit and God. It would appear that Brigit's only reluctance concerning Conall's invasions of rival territories was that he did so under some undefined pagan symbol: the *signa diaboli*. Once he accepted her and God, he is free to attack his enemies without fear of retaliation.

Brigit encounters men wearing pagan symbols who are intent on murder, and who seek her blessing, once more in the *Vita Prima*, and once again in Cogitosus' *Life*. In the former, the saint is approached by idle and vain men who wear diabolical amulets on their heads.[453] She asks that, in return for her blessing, they lift a heavy load for her; they assent and she holds their amulets while they bear the load, as they are forbidden to let the amulets fall to the ground. The saint makes the sign of the cross over the amulets, and the men go on their way, with the aim of killing a certain man. They believe that they behead him, but he is left unharmed, and once they realise what Brigit has done they abandon their amulets. Cogitosus also relates this tale, though his version carries certain interesting details: nine men in 'a certain particular appearance of vain and diabolical superstition', shouting and behaving like madmen, plan to commit murder and bloodshed before the kalends of the following month.[454] Brigit implores the men to abandon their ways and expunge their crimes through true penance.[455] The men refused her, and continue on their wicked task, yet, through another illusion miracle, the men are led to believe that they (quite brutally) killed their objective, while he in fact goes unscathed. Once these would-be murders realise what has transpired they are converted to the Lord through penance.[456] These three episodes may be different versions of one original miracle-tale, which may have been account of Conall's escapades, given the naming of a figure involved in the violence, its comparative length, and its overt political associations. Even so, the three tales convey different aspects of this ritual demand to kill – whether one man is to be killed or a multitude, or if the attackers are wearing a

[453] '...viri otiosi et vani, habentes stigmata diabolica in capitibus suis...', *ibid*., §66.
[454] '...vidit novem viros in forma quadam speciali vanae et diabolicae superstitionis, et plausum habentes vocis ridiculae ad insaniam mentis maximam... antequam Calenda illius mensis supervenirent venturi, aliorum jugulationem et homicidia facere disposuerunt', *VB II*, §25.
[455] '…relictis sua crimina per cordis compunctionem et veram delerent poenitentiam', *ibid*. Here Connolly translates *poenitentiam* as 'repentance', but, considering that the men are encouraged to leave behind their sins through 'remorse of the heart', physical penance might have been understood as the next step in the process of reconciliation; compare *VB II*, §25 and *VB Cog*., §22.
[456] 'Et sic illi, qui antea erant homicidae, per poenitentiam ad Dominum conversi sunt', *VB II*, §25.

peculiar amulet or some form of ritualistic costume and shouting strange noises – and in the reconciliation of the offenders, who either submit to penance or to the benefaction of Brigit. This may demonstrate that the various authors of these texts had no real sense of what these pre-Christian rituals required of their participants, rather holding only a vague and confused memory of bygone customs reduced to pejorative hyperbole for the sake of political or spiritual expedience. These differing versions also illustrate the differing agendas of the writers; whoever designed the miracle related to Conall clearly wanted to associate his dynasty with the saint, implying her protection would be provided to those who submitted to her (and her contemporary cult-leaders), while Cogitosus has recast the episode as one in which Christians who were undertaking misguided pagan rituals are drawn back into the folds of the Church by the grace of Brigit and penance.

Returning to the *Vita Prima*, Brigit is the source of yet another miracle of illusion which allows a king to escape death.[457] This king had visited Brigit at Mag Life, providing her with gifts, after which she blessed him. During the king's journey home, while he sleeps, a man stabs him through the heart three times, apparently killing him, but when his household is alerted to the situation it is revealed that he has suffered only minor wounds. The king returns to Brigit the following day, bestows more gifts on her, and she brokers a peace between him and his enemies. As with the miracles related to Conall, the hagiographer is underlining that Brigit protects the lives of those who honour her.

These various miracle stories not only depict a world where penance was commonplace (accepting the suggested shift in interpretation of 'repentance' to 'penance'), but one in which it is available to laymen and laywomen, even warriors. Here in the Lives of Brigit, penitential space is made for the warrior, but not in the manner one might expect: the warrior is not atoning for the sin of killing itself, he is atoning for the sin of killing without proper authority. Aspects of the *Vita Prima* display attitudes towards killing which are alien to the Penitentials, foremost of which is that one can avoid the retribution of one's enemies through submitting to Brigit. The political undertones of this are quite clear: Brigit shows particular favour to Conall Cremthainne and his family, ancestor of two Southern Uí Néill

[457] *VB I*, §67. The anonymity of the king in question may be due to the writer's wish to create a sense of universality to Brigit's power to protect, that any king, not just one specific king, can secure her aid. It may also be the case that its omission had political undertones, given that it appears after a series of miracles where the saint bestows her favour on Conall, progenitor of the Southern Uí Néill, enduring rivals of the kings of Mag Lifi, the Uí Dúnlainge; on the latter point, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 16-17.

dynasties (the Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega and the Clann Cholmáin of Mide),[458] and to unidentified kings associated with Mag Lifi and the over-kingdom of the Laigin.[459] Conall was apparently baptised by Patrick himself, who promised the king and his descendants his full support, so long as they supported his successors (*i.e.*, Armagh) in return.[460] This is a strong endorsement for the family of Conall from two important saints, but where Patrick offers only a vague promise of support, Brigit demonstrates her powers of protection and offers her tacit acceptance of his violent deeds, but only once Conall has surrendered his folk traditions and fully submitted to her. Cogitosus' Brigit brings warriors to penance, but it remains unclear whether or not they returned to their violent ways once their penance was completed; given the other versions of this miracle tale, it might be assumed that they did, as they were not atoning for killing itself, but for intending to kill under non-Christian auspices.

3.4 Common threads in the Brigitine and Patrician traditions

These texts, by and large, provide us with a relatively coherent, if limited, depiction of penitential practice as it was understood by the exponents of the cults of Brigit and Patrick. Many of the key elements are found scattered throughout these *Vitae*: thorough interrogation followed by confession, which led to penance and absolution, may have been the standard process by which sins were purged, with weeping, fasting, fear and trembling, and the giving of alms composing the earthly means of restitution for a given offence. Large ecclesiastical centres, such as Armagh and Kildare, appear to have counted substantial numbers of penitents among their congregations; these penitents, it seems clear, could be drawn from any quarter of medieval Irish society, whether they were from the secular or ecclesiastical world. The description of the penitential restitution of, for example, a virgin who had broken her vow, a hermit who defied a saint, foiled thieves, and warriors soaked in (illusory) blood

[458] *VB I*, §60, §§62-64. Conall Cremthainne, son of Niall Noígiallach, was the ancestor of two Southern Uí Néill dynasties (the Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega and the Clann Cholmáin of Mide) and grandfather to Diarmait mac Cerbaill; see above, n. 440 and n. 445. There may be a further reference to Conall in the *Vita Prima*, Conall's name having been removed to avoid political impropriety or inconsistency in Brigit's favour; *VB I* , §65, and above, n. 424.
[459] *VB I*, §67 and §88. Note that Mag Lifi is a constituent of the over-kingdom of the Laigin; the Uí Dúnlainge controlled the former territory and often held the over-kingship of the Laigin throughout the eighth century; see above, n. 457, and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 618-619. The Uí Dúnlainge owe their rise to success in the seventh century to Fáelán mac Colmáin (d. 666), whose brother, Áed Dub (d. 639), was the abbot and bishop of Kildare; see Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 151-152, and AU 639.4 and AT 666.8.
[460] Tírechán, [III 1] §10, pp. 132-133.

would suggest that the authors of these various texts expected their audience to understand that penance was available to all who sought it, not simply dependants of the Church or a quasi-monastic lay elite. It is hinted in both the Patrician and Brigitine traditions that penance was fixed in term, such that sinful bishops suffered the penance of monks, or warriors could return to their violent deeds after having made restitution. Such allusions demonstrate that fixed-term penance was not an abstraction, a system limited to the Penitentials themselves, but a mechanism for atonement which was offered to lay and ecclesiast alike.

Both the Patrician and Brigitine Lives depict the saints as powerful patrons, wielders of divine might a wise man might court. The Patrician demonstration of such powers is comparatively simplistic: Patrick smites those who contravene both his person and those under his protection. The Brigitine tradition as a whole also wishes to portray a saint worthy of patronage in return for favour and grace, but certain strands of the *Vita Prima* reveal a willingness on behalf of the ecclesiastical centre which produced either the composite *Life* itself, or certain sections of its constituent elements, to demonstrate her power to actively change the course of battle, to aid in the bellicose deeds of kings in life or death, to protect those who have carried out slaughter from retribution. Where Cogitosus' Brigit brings warriors to penance, certain elements of the *Vita Prima* allow these same warriors to continue in their bloody ways, but only once they have submitted to the authority of Brigit; the problem for this latter Brigit, it would seem, is not killing itself, but the authority under which such killing occurs. This issue is also explored by Adomnán but is not grafted into the Irish Penitentials until the influence of Theodore of Canterbury takes hold, as shall be discussed in subsequent chapters, which may imply that the hagiographers of Brigit and Patrick recorded the currents of an on-going debate as to the role of the Church in public violence, as opposed to the private violence accounted for in the Penitentials and their related texts. While this debate will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 7, it may be profitable to investigate certain salient points pertaining to these *Vitae* specifically.

As we have seen, the Brigit of the *Vita Prima* meets Conall and his companions while they are wearing 'sinister amulets', a symbol of some bond which compels them to murder and kill their enemies.[461] At another point in that text, the saint meets another group of men wearing 'diabolical amulets', also intent on murder.[462] Cogitosus too refers to such

[461] See above, n. 448.
[462] *Ibid.*, n. 453.

characters,[463] and Patrick's life is threatened by a savage ruler who wears emblems of wicked cruelty, which may imply a similar practice.[464] Brigit informs the wife of Conall's son, who had beseeched the saint to pray that she herself might bear a son, that 'the sons of kings are serpents, and sons of blood, and sons of death'.[465] These 'sons of death' have been equated to *fían*-groups, warrior-bands which consisted primarily of young, landless men who were 'encouraged by their aristocratic coevals to indulge in homicide, head-hunting, plunder and sexual promiscuity', who could in later life become accepted members of society.[466] While we have met such figures already – recall the giant son of the son of Cass son of Glas encountered by Tírechán's Patrick who says that he was murdered by the *fían* of the son of Maicc Con[467] – there does not appear to be any reference to *fíana* wearing anything that could be taken for amulets, sinister or otherwise.[468] If Conall was a king at the time he participated in his ritually demanded acts of killing, this would also call into question the argument that his actions could be associated with the *fían*. There may be more at work here than socially tolerated gangs of youths which existed on the fringes of the Christian community

While we may tentatively disassociate these *fíana* from the intriguing homicidal amulet-wearers, the practice of *díberg* bears a striking resemblance; this was a ritualised form of brigandage with a particular focus on murder that involved an evil pledge and the wearing of diabolic symbols (though one may wonder if a king could also be considered a brigand).[469] It may have been that a king could have imposed an oath on his subjects to accomplish a certain murderous deed, or that it was an elaborate rite of passage,[470] and that such an oath would have had its roots in native pagan practices, a relic that survived in a Christian setting. Our bloodthirsty, amulet-wearing bands might then be considered Christian participants in a *díberg*-ritual which has non-Christian overtones.

There is a curious linguistic feature that, in a sense, unites many of these murderers, persecutors, killers of kings, and wicked emblem-wearing men; quite often they appear in

[463] *Ibid.*, n. 454.
[464] *Ibid.*, n. 362. It is worth noting that *signa* is glossed as *diberca* in the version of Muirchú's work found in the Book of Armagh; Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 102, *apparatus*.
[465] See above, n. 441.
[466] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 299-300.
[467] See above, n. 360.
[468] Richard Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', *Ériu*, 30 (1979), pp. 86-87.
[469] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', pp. 82-86. Sharpe explicitly connects this practice with paganism, dismissing the fact that the participants are depicted as repenting their ways and often undertake penance, not baptism, which would imply that they are, at the very least, nominal Christians who were perpetuating an ancient custom rather than outright non-Christians.
[470] See Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 13-15.

connection with the term *iugulare*. For example, the giant whom Patrick resurrects employs this term in the description of his murder: 'Iugulauit me *fian maicc* Maicc Con'.[471] Equally, in each instance where Brigit meets warriors (including Conall) who have been sent out to kill specific targets, their goal is described in terms of *iugulare*,[472] as is the thwarted kin-slaying of Conall and Cairpre.[473] Adomnán also uses the term to describe Columba's battle with demons who hoped to kill his monks with stakes,[474] the death of an unnamed Persecutor who killed an innocent girl hiding beneath the saint's vestments,[475] and the death of Áed Dub, killer of the divinely ordained ruler of Ireland.[476] The manner in which this term is employed seems to suggest that the deaths in question occurred under nefarious circumstances or were contrary to the divine will of God. In this light, *iugulare* may have been employed to express a type of unsanctioned killing, which is to say, a killing that occurred without the support of a legitimate authority.[477] The fact that this term is used in a similar fashion across a variety of texts from rival institutions would imply a common understanding of its sense, which, coupled with its consistent association with sinister deeds, would suggest a broad consensus on the parameters of illegal killing across the Churches which controlled the cults of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick. By specifically defining what constitutes illegal killing, these Lives suggest that there are legal, acceptable forms of killing, a position helpfully illuminated by Brigit's support and protection of certain kings (Columba's relationship with secular authority, especially in matter of killing, will be explored in detail in the following chapter). While Brigit of the *Vita Prima* may have denounced the sons of kings to be 'sons of death', she does pray for the queen, and she explicitly supports Conall and the unnamed ever-victorious king of the Laigin in their bloody deeds. It appears to be the case that, in these tales, Brigit's purpose is not to admonish the actions or the violence employed by kings, but merely to reveal to them that they are operating without the consent of legitimate authority,

[471] See above, n. 360.
[472]: '…inimicos jugulare et interficere...', *VB I*, §63 (in reference to Conall's imagined violent escapade); '...alioquem jugulare... et jugulaverunt eum...', *ibid.*, §66 (the tale of anonymous men wearing diabolical symbols on the heads); '…aliorum jugulationem et homicidia facere disposuerunt… imaginem instar viri, quem debuissent jugulare, contemplantes, continuo suis jugulantes lanceis', *VB II*, §25 (Cogitosus' version, relating the nine men in curious guise).
[473] '…et iste duo fraters nunc mutuo se jugugulabunt', *VB I*, §62.
[474] '…multos ex fratribus hisdem volebant jugulare sudibus', *VC*, III 8.
[475] '...filiam sub vestimentis eorum lancea jugulavit', *VC*, II 25.
[476] '…et ad ultimum lancea jugulatus', *VC*, I 36.
[477] The tale of Lam Dess offers an interesting caveat to this; this man, who attempted to kill Columba, suffers death at the hands of a spear thrown in the saint's name: 'Lam-dess, in quantum potuit, Findluganum mea jugulavit vice; sed et ipse, ut aestimo, hac in hora jugulatur', *VC*, II 24.We might wonder why the act of retribution for the attempt on Columba's life is described using a term that appears to have sinister undertones, but it may have served to reinforce the notion that those who threatened the founder of Iona come to a very unpleasant end.

which is, of course, that of the Christian God as mediated by Brigit and her Church. When Conall casts aside his amulet, the bloodshed does not desist: it simply continues with Brigit's implicit approval and actual protection. Cogitosus' opinion is somewhat indeterminate as to whether his Brigit was condemning the desire for bloodshed itself, or the auspices under which it was embarked upon.

The Patrician texts are focused on developing the image of Patrick as the apostle of the Irish, converter of kings and the founder of numerous churches, the contemporary descendants of which all owe Armagh their due, either politically or materially. He acts as a patron to important dynastic founders, but rarely comments on the actions by which they secure their authority. Few hints are given about the practice of penance at Armagh, other than that penitents gathered in its precincts, the penance of monks was available to the clergy, and that permanent exile could be imposed. The complex Brigitine traditions offer more depth in terms of penance and bloodshed: penitential acts are noted across all the texts, ranging from physical castigation to the provision of alms, but, in her patronage of kings, there is dissention as to the role of saint. While certain strands of the *Vita Prima* agree that she is a powerful ally for a king to have, disagreeing on whether this king is of the Laigin or the Southern Uí Néill, Cogitosus does not involve his subject in such political associations, having her meet only two unnamed kings of unknown territories. Both the Brigitine and Patrician traditions depict a world in which penance was an accepted practice, and the former especially underlines that bloodshed, when committed under legitimate ecclesiastical authority, was tolerated, possibly even encouraged. Brigit protects those kings and their warriors, whether in combat or from retribution, who submit to her patronage, even going so far as to appear in battle in one episode. In this we see a subtle distinction in culpability that had not yet appeared in the penitential texts: the early Penitentials did not distinguish between intentional killing with malice aforethought by an individual acting alone and acting with a certain expectation of killing as part of one's role in society, which is to say, the difference between a farmer killing his neighbour over a disputed field and a warrior killing another warrior in open combat while under the command of a king, who may also have been settling a disagreement over territory. For the warrior, his freedom is not entirely his own as he has a sworn duty to fight for his lord. Broadly speaking, under the system outlined in these various *Vitae*, kings could go about the bloody business of war with the blessing of a saint, which may be indicative of a tacit acceptance of the pervasiveness, and perhaps necessity, of violence by the Irish Church. They could not, however, kill with impunity, and could be

thwarted in their violent wishes by a deft miracle or two at the hand of a saint, underlining the necessity for contemporary secular powers to collaborate with their ecclesiastic counterparts. Killing in combat was not accounted for in any of the penitential texts examined so far, an oversight which may have impeded, if not precluded, those whose occupation was to express violence physically and often from submitting to confession and seeking absolution for their bloody sins. The two hagiographical traditions discussed echo the Penitentials in their desire to extend the medicine of penance to all quarters of society, and, while they do not go so far as to expressly encourage penitential restitution for legitimate acts of killing, they do offer a veneer of authority and protection to those who commit such acts. The difference may be the perception of the role of the Church in the affairs of the secular world: the Penitentials are an expression of the desire to extend pastoral care to the Christian community, while hagiography is a political device which reveals the Church as patron and landlord, both spiritually and physically, and as small 'kingdoms' faced with inevitable compromises with the secular world for the sake of survival. On the local, personal scale of the Penitentials, bloodshed was a serious sin that had to be expunged with an arduous diligence equal to the gravity of the crime to ensure social cohesion. The saints' Lives operated on a different level, where the individual was subsumed into the collective, and certain stark necessities had to be recognised: conflict, and the killing that accompanied it, was inescapable. Not unlike how modern states differentiate between one citizen who kills another and a soldier who kills in defence of the nation, the Penitentials and the *Vitae* speak to different aspects of medieval Irish society. Yet, where Brigit and Patrick, in the hands of their hagiographers, act as little more than patrons who demand temporal obedience in return for spiritual aid, permitting violent deeds for the promise of political support, Adomnán had something very different in mind for Columba: not only would he shape the founder of Iona into a hero of biblical proportions, but he would attempt to save the innocent from harm.

Chapter 4: Adomnán of Iona on Penance and Bloodshed

4.1 The Fearsome Hagiographer

In Adomnán of Iona we are presented not only with a man of rare character, but with a man who has left a rare body of evidence. As a hagiographer, his *Vita Columbae* is strikingly original and layered. As a statesman, the law-code which bears his name is unique in its scope, legally, geographically, and politically, for this period, and indeed for generations to come. As a churchman, he was remembered as being pious and wise, and as the author of a guidebook to the holy sites of Jerusalem.[478] The survival of so many of his works and his participation in political affairs offers us a glimpse at his motivations and goals, a stark contrast to other churchmen examined so far, such as Finnian, Muirchú, and Cogitosus. Becoming the ninth abbot of Iona in 679 at the age of about fifty-two, it appears that Adomnán was from outside the Ionan community itself,[479] though he was a member of the broader *familia Columbae* and of the Cenél Conaill (a powerful dynasty of the Northern Uí Néill), as were six of the preceding eight abbots, including the founder of the monastery, Columba.[480] He was not, however, from the same branch of the family, that descended of Columba's uncle Ninnid, which had ruled the community for the fifty years before his election, but of a line descended from another of the founder's uncles, Sétna, which had been the ruling dynasty of the Cenél Conaill since the late sixth century.[481] The third longest

[478] Bede directly refers to Adomnán's mission to Aldfrith and the issue of Easter, and, in his reproduction of a letter by Ceolfrith to Necthan, king of the Picts, he provides us with a second piece of evidence indicative of the esteem in which Adomnán was held, as the abbot of Jarrow refers to 'Adamnan abbas et sacerdos Columbiensium egregius'; *HE*, V 15 and 21.

[479] Adomnán notes a personal relationship with his predecessor, Faílbe (669-679), but not with any other abbot of the community; *VC*, I 1 and I 3. This has led to the suggestion that, though he must have been drawn from the *familia Columbae*, he did not join the mother-house until after 669; Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic* Familia *of Columba* (Oxford, 1988), p. 47. The evidence supporting this theory has been called into question by Sharpe, who argues that there is no proof that Adomnán was a member of any other community prior to his becoming abbot of Iona, though, as a member of not only a royal dynasty but also of the saint's, he may have spent time at several establishments of the *familia*; Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Columba* (London, 1995), pp. 44-46. Herbert previously hypothesised that Adomnán was recruited by Faílbe during his three year visit to Ireland (673-676), and, though his family had not held the abbacy before, Adomnán had closer ties to the ruling dynasty of the Cenél Conaill than any of his predecessors for nearly a century; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 47-48.

[480] Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 45-47.

[481] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-48. Aside from the brief five year abbacy of Suibhne moccu Urthri (652-657), the descendants of Ninnid held the position without interruption from 623 to 679: Ségene (623-652), Cumméne (657-669), and Faílbe (669-679). Ségene was preceded by another outsider, Fergna, who ruled for nearly twenty years, a considerable break in family politics, and who had succeeded the first of Ninnid's descendants to hold the title, Laisrén (d. 605), whose brief tenure followed Baíthéne, who had in turn succeed Columba (d. 597).

serving abbot of Iona after Columba and Ségéne, Adomnán was a highly trained Christian scholar widely known in medieval Europe for his work *De locis sanctis*,[482] essentially a religious geography of the Holy Land, yet the work for which he is most readily identified with nowadays, the *Vita Columbae*, was, by contrast, hardly recognised outside regions where Columba was a popular saint in the same period.[483] He was also the promulgator of a *cáin*, an ecclesiastical law, which shows concern for the treatment of innocents, and in particular women, beyond that of the traditional Irish law-codes.[484] Just as Iona occupied an important role in both the religious and political worlds of northern Ireland and northern Britain, Adomnán played the role of both abbot and statesman. Tangible results of this juncture of monastic authority and secular influence may be seen in his securing the release of Uí Néill hostages from Northumbria in 687,[485] in his ability to attach an impressive number of ecclesiastics and kings to the guarantor list of the *Cáin Adomnáin*, and in certain aspects of the *Vita Columbae*. The expedition to Northumbria and the *Cáin* show Adomnán's particular concern for the victims of conflict, and several passages from *Vita Columbae* may reveal, through the voice and deeds of the subject, the writer's own opinions regarding penance and bloodshed. Adomnán, or at least as much of him as can be gleaned from these texts, was not a naive or blindly hopeful and pious abbot who sought to bring peace to the Irish; he was a practical man who knew that, though he could not end conflict, he could hope to limits its effects through the power of the Church and Columba. Unlike the preceding hagiographers, Adomnán embarked on a radical strategy to change the relationship between Church and 'state'. It was not enough for kings submit to Columba and the authority of Iona, changing hardly a jot of their habits as they had done with Brigit and Patrick; Adomnán wanted more.

[482] Thomas O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London, 2007), pp. 183-188.
[483] Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán: a man of many parts', in Thomas O'Loughlin (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697: essays in commemoration of the law of innocents* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 48-49.
[484] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the law of the innocents', in O'Loughlin (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697*, p. 13.
[485] Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 48.

4.2 The *Cáin Adomnáin*

4.2.1 A composite document

The *Cáin Adomnáin* (also known as the *Lex innocentium*) is an Old-Irish law text,[486] purportedly inspired by an angelic visitation,[487] promulgated at Birr in 697.[488] A *cáin* (plural, *cánai*) was a law promulgated by an authority, specifically the Church, as opposed to the *fénechas*, or customary law, preserved by the native legal class and which was not under the influence of any particular king.[489] While no one king ruled over the whole of Ireland in the early Middle Ages who could have enacted laws in the manner of Continental monarchs, the multitude of Irish kings could enact specific ordinances, known as *rechtgae* (plural, *rechtgai*),[490] in times of emergency within their own territories, which would have been proclaimed at an *óenach*, or assembly of the *túatha*.[491] The ecclesiastical *cáin* or *recht* may also have been promulgated at such a meeting.[492] While the legal authority of a king did not extend beyond his own *túath*, the great monastic *paruchiae* offered an interesting loophole as, although their foundations could be scattered among many *túatha*, the daughter houses of such large federations submitted to the authority of the founding father (as transmitted via his

[486] The first edition of the text was compiled by Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Adomnáin: An Old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adomnan* (Oxford, 1905). While the Old Irish text of this edition was consulted in the preparation of this thesis, the translation examined was offered by Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (trans.), 'The law of Adomnán: a translation', in O'Loughlin (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697*, pp. 53-68. Note that this translation is concerned only with the *cáin* itself, and does not include the Middle-Irish tale of Adomnán's mother. A second translation, itself a composite of the versions presented by Meyer, Márkus, and Ní Dhonnchadha, was also consulted: *Cáin Adomnáin*, in Pádraig Ó Néill and David N. Dumville (eds. and trans.), *Cáin Adomnáin and Canones Adomnani* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 20-51.

[487] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §33. The Middle-Irish Preface, §§1-27, of the *Cáin* describes how Adomnán was encouraged to remove the threat of conflict from the lives of women by his mother Rónnat, see Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the law of the innocents', pp. 16-17, and Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin*, pp. 2-15.

[488] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the law of the innocents', p. 13.

[489] Kelly, *Law*, p. 21. For a concise overview of the construction, promulgation, and influences of *cánai* and *rechtgai*, see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *The Early Mediaeval Gaelic Lawyer* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 43-62.

[490] Kings may have pronounced laws in the Continental fashion, but these would not have been recorded as they would have been oral in nature, see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish law', in Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí, (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: vol.1 Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), p. 332.

[491] A *túath* (plural, *túatha*) was the basic territorial unit in early medieval Ireland, a petty kingdom ruled over by a *rí túaithe* ('king of a *túath*'). There may have been between 80 to 150 such kings at any one time in Ireland between the fifth and twelfth centuries. These kings held no legal authority outside their own territory, but could become overlords of other *túatha*, becoming a *rí túatha* 'king of *túath*s' or a *ruiri* 'great king', who could in turn be dominated by a *ri ruirech* 'king of great kings'. While the figure of the *rí Érenn* 'king of Ireland' does appear in early Irish literature, most of the law-texts do not provide for such an individual as no king achieved such a status until the late-ninth century. An *óenach* was the regular assembly of *túath* for political, social, and commercial purposes. See Kelly, *Law*, pp. 3-4 and p. 17.

[492] For example, both the 'Law of Patrick' and the 'Law of Ciarán' were promulgated, in 783 and 814 respectively, at the Cruachain *óenach*; see Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish law', p. 335.

successors) and to canon law, allowing for the possibility of, in a sense, a supra-*túath* legal authority. The Law of Adomnán was, however, a *cáin* of singular significance among such promulgated codes: rather than being pronounced at a provincial *óenach*, it was proclaimed at a far more distinguished event known as a *rígdál*, a meeting of kings, and was enacted under the combined authority of ninety-one leading Irish ecclesiastics and kings, together with other important (or unidentified) figures.[493]

The text in which the *Cáin* is found can be divided into four parts: the Middle-Irish preface (§§1-27),[494] which relates how Adomnán was encouraged to defend the women of Ireland by his mother; the Old-Irish preamble and guarantor list (§§28-32); the angelic demand (§33), which is the only part of the text in Latin; and the law itself (§§34-53), which returns to Old-Irish. It survives as a late tenth- or early eleventh-century copy from the monastery of Raphoe.[495] In his edition, Meyer states that the whole text was originally composed in the ninth century.[496] Ní Dhonnchadha believes otherwise, stating that, while the *Cáin* itself is undoubtedly authentic (though the angelic directive may be an addition), the preface to the text is a late tenth- or early eleventh-century Middle-Irish addition.[497] Having identified all but nineteen of the subscribers to the *Cáin*, Ní Dhonnchadha is confident that the fifty-eight figures for whom we have an obit, and twelve for whom there is circumstantial evidence for their being alive at the time of the Synod of Birr, indicate that the list, and the law which follows it, is indeed authentic, and dateable to 697.[498] Against this lies the issue that the titles of several of these figures are not accurate for 697 (some were *tánaisí ríg* or *táinisí abbad*, heirs-apparent to kingships or abbacies, at the time of promulgation); Ní Dhonnchadha argues that the original text did not carry the regnal or abbatial titles of the guarantors, but that they were added later by a scribe who was not in possession of all the details, which explains why some individuals are ascribed to incorrect locations.[499] This very point, it would seem, also reinforces the authenticity of the text, as a list of names lacking

[493] *Ibid*., pp. 334-335, and Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents', pp. 13-15.
[494] See above, n. 487.
[495] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Columba, Adomnán and the cult of saints in Scotland', *The Innes Review*, 48.1 (Spring, 1997), p. 7.
[496] Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin*, p. viii.
[497] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán: a translation', pp. 54-56, and 'Birr and the Law of Innocents', pp. 16-17.
[498] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list of the *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 185-215.
[499] *Ibid*., pp. 182-185.

titles would only be comprehensible at the time of composition, underlined by the fact that, within five years of its proclamation, nineteen of the *Cáin*'s signatories were dead.[500]

With the authenticity of the guarantor list seemingly secure, what are we to make of the remainder of the text? The language of the law and the preceding tale of Adomnán's mother form a clear divide, the former being in Old-Irish, and the latter in Middle-Irish, as noted previously.[501] Aside from the linguistic arguments, the tale of Adomnán's mother beseeching him to write the law would seem to be rendered superfluous, perhaps even irrelevant, by the angelic demand, which, one would imagine, would have held greater authority. Ignoring the Middle-Irish preface as a later supplement to the original, we are still faced with the interesting feature of a Latin section appearing between two Old-Irish portions of the text. As discussed above, the majority of the individuals found in the guarantor list have been identified and shown to have been alive at the time of promulgation, and so it would appear that the angelic vision was inserted into the text as an introduction of sorts to the law itself. The angelic decree is concerned only with women and is in Latin, while the Old-Irish *Cáin* encompass all innocents;[502] in contrast to the almost functional practicality of the law, the directive is decidedly otherworldly and brutally violent. The fact that the majority of the law is in the vernacular would suggest that it was intended to be widely understood, making the Latin element all the more curious. This leads one to consider the idea that it was added later, after the abbot's death, to provide heavenly support in the absence of the terrestrial authority of this particularly influential heir of Columba; or perhaps the law was too innovative and so required some aspect of divine stimulus to gain widespread acceptance. It has been suggested that the Latin element may have been inserted by Iona, perhaps on the occasion of the renewal of the Law in 727,[503] or that it is a product of Raphoe or Kells, a gloss or insertion added to the original Old-Irish text, as it is unlikely that Adomnán's successors on Iona would have omitted the protection of clerics and youths.[504] In this light, I will discuss §33 separately from §§28-32 and §§34-53.

---

[500] *Ibid.*

[501] Herbert is cautious in ascribing (near-) contemporaneity to any element of the text, except the list of names, though she does appear to accept that Adomnán was in a unique position to exploit his royal and ecclesiastical ties to gain support for such a law; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 50-51.

[502] Clerics and youths are referred to by themselves only twice, and (as noted above) with women on five occasions; Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §35 and §36.

[503] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán: a translation', p. 56. The law was reissued thirty years after its original promulgation; AU 727.5.

[504] Ó Néill and Dumville, *Canones Adomnani and Cáin Adomnáin*, p. xxxvi. In their discussion of the angelic directive, Ó Néill and Dumville appear to be obliquely criticising Ní Dhonnchadha's eighth-century dating of

4.2.2 The Law

As mentioned previously, the guarantor list of the *Cáin Adomnáin* is lengthy, and includes senior ecclesiastical and secular figures from throughout Ireland, such as Fland of Febail, bishop of Armagh, and Loingsech macc Óengusa, 'king of Ireland', and four individuals from northern Britain.[505] Designed to limit the involvement and suffering of women, clerics, and innocent youths in conflict, the *Cáin* describes a detailed series of fines and punishments, and the apparatus for their judgement and enforcement. What is striking is how little religious castigation appears in the text; it more closely resembles an Old-Irish law code, and specifically mentions penance in only two canons. The first of these references is found in the angel's directive to Adomnán as part of the punishment for killing a woman (discussed below),[506] and the second is in a passage concerning the punishment for killing a clerical student or innocent youth.[507] A fine of eight *cumal*s[508] and eight years of penance was demanded for every individual of a warband that numbered up to three hundred involved in the killing of a cleric or a youth, and one *cumal* and one year of penance for a group of three hundred to a thousand.[509] The latter fine is also extended to anyone who sees the crime being committed but does not intervene.[510] If the crime is committed inadvertently, or through ignorance, the penalty is halved.[511] These last two stipulations underline the social responsibility inherent in the law, and its recognition of degrees of culpability. The latter of these bears some resemblance to the increasing nuance in terms for manslaughter or

---

this particular element, specifically questioning the possibility that Adomnán's successors on eighth-century Iona would have misrepresented their former abbot's intentions.

[505] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §28. The signatories from Britain were Curetán, bishop of Rosemarkie (22), two kings of Dál Riada, Fíanamail úa Dúnchatha (77) and Euchu úa Domnaill (85), and Bruide macc Derilei, king of the Picts (91). For the identification of these figures, see Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The guarantor-list of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', pp. 185-215. Bruide was succeeded by his brother, Nechtan, to whom Ceolfrith wrote a letter, as noted above, n. 478.

[506] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §33. The various punishments of this text are outlined in Table 3 below, p. 238.

[507] *Ibid.*, §35. It is interesting to note that the angel's directive concerns only women, which would seem to suggest that the protection of clerics and youths was not part of the divine mandate; perhaps there had been some success in limiting the impact of violence on youths and clerics, yet the protection of women had been a failure, hence the severity of the punishments and the ascription to an angel.

[508] This is one *cumal* more than required by the secular law codes. It would appear that under early Irish law homicide carried a fixed penalty of seven *cumal*s if the victim was a freeman of any rank. This penalty is the *éraic*, and is independent of the fine due to the kin based on the honour-price of the victim. The culprit's kin were expected to contribute if the offender himslef could not pay, and the guilty party could be held captive until payment was made; he could be sold into slavery or put to death if payment was not forthcoming; see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 125-127, and p. 129. It may at first seem curious that Adomnán's preferred method of payment is in *cumal*s, female slaves, but it is likely that this term had by that time been shorn of such an association and simply refers to a unit of value, as he later refers to payments of half seven *cumal*s (one can hardly imagine that he expected a physical halving of living property); Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §44.

[509] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §35.

[510] *Ibid.*

[511] *Ibid.*

accidental killing seen in the Penitentials, but it is a nuance that moves in a different direction: it is not a case of the killer not having wished to extinguish a life, but rather a situation where the intention to kill was real, but the victim suffered a fatal case of mistaken identity.

The Law of Adomnán demands that if a woman is killed by human action, by an animal, by fire, or by some misadventure with any tool or man-made construction, the full fine for her death is to be paid by the person responsible for the property.[512] If, however, the woman in question is 'senseless', a third of this fine is remitted.[513] The following canon reinforces that full fines are to be paid for the unnatural, violent death of a woman, and that the fine is due to Adomnán (*i.e.*, Iona).[514] This includes death or wounding by domestic animals, the penalty for which is, if it is the first offence, the immediate death of the animal and a fine equal to half the value of a human hand; if it is the second offence, the full fine is due.[515] The only situations under which a woman can die where fines are not paid are when it is the result of an act of God or of a lawful union (which is to say, childbirth).[516]

If a woman kills a woman or a man, or causes the death of another by poisoning, she deserves to be put to death, according to this law, though there is no indication that her kin have to compensate the victim's family or undergo penance, as in the case of a man killing a woman.[517] The woman is placed in a boat with one paddle, cast out to the sea, as the judgement of her crime lies with God. This last stipulation is curious; perhaps Adomnán was trapped by the logic of his own law, such that he could not demand the killing of an innocent, even for a crime that merited such a punishment, and so the decision had to be left to the highest possible judge.

---

[512] *Ibid.*, §41.
[513] *Ibid*. Meyer's translation here is quite confusing, but Ní Dhonnchadha has teased out the sense; compare Meyer, *Cain Adomnáin*, pp. 26-29 and Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The law of Adomnán', p. 64.
[514] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §42.
[515] *Ibid*. This may be inspired by Exodus 21:29, which also requires the owner of the animal to be put to death, a stipulation Adomnán does not enforce.
[516] *Ibid*.
[517] *Ibid*, §45. This canon also imposes this punishment on a woman who committed arson or dug beneath a church (presumably for precious relics or valuable objects). The killing of women by men is discussed below, pp. 117-119. In his examination of this passage, Fraser misleadingly states that the crime is that of a woman who has killed an *innocens*, which would imply that another woman, cleric, or youth was the victim; James E. Fraser, 'Adomnán and the morality of war', in Jonathan M. Wooding *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), p. 106. The text explicitly states that the penalty is for *marbad fir nó mná* 'killing of a man or a woman'. The scope of this law is far broader than Fraser would have us believe. Fraser, in the same paragraph, uses this section of the law as evidence that Adomnán thought that death as a punishment could only come by the hand of God, which may, or may not, be an accurate understanding of the abbot's beliefs, depending on whether one is to accept the demand for execution found in the angelic directive (discussed below) to be original or not.

It has been argued that the *Cáin* attempts to protect women who might be pushed into combat, or who were imperilled along with other innocents as a result of military failure, such as a rout, as they may have been seen as legitimate targets in their role of supporting to the fighting troops.[518] Indeed, in the Middle-Irish preface, this is the very reason why Adomnán's mother demands that he create the law.[519] While this may have been part of the intention – to prohibit employment of women in combat or as support to warriors – I would argue that 'use' of women could imply rape. Sections §§50-51 of the law are both concerned with the dignity of women in some fashion, the first being penalties for rape and sexual assault (seemingly in peacetime), and the second for defaming their character. The following section, ignoring for the moment the 'making use of women' element, also refers to the penalties for making a woman pregnant illegally. It would seem odd, then, to insert a prohibition against employing women as combatants between these sexual proscriptions. It is more likely that the 'use of women in a massacre or a muster or a raid'[520] is the unfortunate outcome for the women who survive the military assault, whether they were among the assorted non-combatants who often accompanied warriors or armies, or were inhabitants of settlements under attack. The fact that this aspect of the law applies only to women also lends weight to the possibility that the crime in question could only happen to a woman (the press-ganging of able-bodied youths or clerics in a last-ditch defence of a settlement may not have been uncommon, yet is not legislated for).[521] The penalty for this transgression is seven *cumal*s for the first seven men, after which it is considered the crime of one man. The penalty for rape, during peacetime as it were, is half seven *cumal*s.[522] Under native law, the fine due was the honour-price of the woman's legal guardian, plus a full *éraic* (body-fine) if the woman was of marrying age, a nun, or a primary wife, but only a half *éraic* if a concubine.[523]

[518] Fraser, 'Adomnán and the morality of war', pp. 98-99.
[519] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §§6-11. §7 in particular describes the tragic image of a baby lying at the breast of its dead mother on a battlefield strewn with bodies.
[520] 'Mad air-bert bansgál i n-orgain nó cuire nó feachta...'; *Cáin Adomnáin*, §52.
[521] In his discussion of this section, Fraser cites the massacre of British monks by the pagan forces of Aethelfrith during a battle near Chester recorded in *HE*, II 2 as evidence of the possibility of the ruthless targeting of non-combatants in times of conflict, and he argues that it was this 'imperilling of innocents' that the abbot of Iona wished to end; Fraser, 'Adomnán and the morality of war', pp. 98-99. Adomnán, however, makes no reference to clerics or innocent youths in this passage (§52): it is specifically concerned with women, as are the surrounding passages. Adomnán was probably well aware of holy men being directly involved in battles, praying for victory from the periphery, as Columba himself was a participant in such activities; AU 561.1-2. If Adomnán meant this passage to protect all innocents, including clerics, from 'use' in war, surely he would have mentioned them? It seems more likely that he did expect the clergy to participate in conflicts (though of course spiritually, not physically), and perhaps youths under certain circumstances (in defence of the home, for example), but that women deserved greater protection in terms of physical violation.
[522] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §50.
[523] Kelly, *Law*, pp. 134-135.

If an unaccompanied woman was assaulted in an ale-house, no fines were due, as it was considered to be wrong for her to be in such a place alone.[524] If we accept that this section is indeed referring to the physical violation of women, making the penalty for the rape of women during times of violence seven *cumal*s, the logic behind the half-penalty for rape during peacetime in the *Cáin* may be that it was assumed that the woman would be under the protection of her family, who therefore carry part of the liability for placing her in a situation where the assault has occurred, a protection she would not be afforded if they had been killed or driven off in battle.[525]

4.2.3 The angel's directive

While, as noted above, this section could fall outside the chronological remit of this thesis, it may still be indicative of Adomnán's attitudes towards bloodshed which persisted, with some revision, into the tenth and eleventh centuries. An angel informs Adomnán that he should enshrine in law that the women of Ireland and Britain ought not, under any circumstances, be killed by men, beast, or accident, such that the only 'lawful' death of woman could be in her bed, presumably in childbirth or from old age.[526] Whosoever kills a woman is to be condemned to a twofold punishment: first his right hand and left foot are to be cut off, and then he is executed. The offender's family have to pay seven *cumal*s and the value of seven years' penance.[527] The guilty party may escape dismemberment and death if he can afford to pay fourteen *cumal*s and undertake fourteen years' penance.[528] If a multitude has committed

[524] *Ibid.*
[525] *Ibid.*, p. 135.
[526] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §33.
[527] The translation of the final element, *… 7 septimam penitentiae*, seems to be a point of debate; Meyers translates it as 'one seventh part of the penance', while Ní Dhonnchadha has '[the price of] seven years' penance'; compare Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin*, p. 25 and Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán', p. 62. While Meyer's translation is more accurate, Ní Dhonnchadha's appears to be the more logical considering that the subsequent stipulation doubles the number of *cumal*s required, from seven to fourteen, and demands payment for fourteen years' penance, which we might assume to be a doubling of the previous term. If the killer is put to death he cannot suffer penance, so it is reasonable that his family would have to pay his fine and for his penance; paying for either one seventh of a year or seven years' penance could make sense in this case, though again the latter seems more likely. Furthermore, the killing of a cleric or innocent youth demands eight years of penance and eight *cumal*s; from this simple addition of a *cumal* to the fine we might also assume that a year has been added to the term of penance. We might also presume that the value of seven years penance is seven *cumal*s.
[528] Here again Meyer and Ní Dhonnchadha disagree on the translation; Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin*, p. 25 and Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán', p. 62. Here Meyer's translation seems most plausible, that the criminal is to undertake penance, rather than offer its value in payment as Ní Dhonnchadha inserts, as, unlike the preceding scenario, the offender remains alive, and it may have been understood that he must personally purge his sin.

the crime, every fifth man up to three hundred must suffer the above punishment. If the offenders are few in number (though how few is not specified), they are to be divided into three groups: the first are put to death, after dismemberment, by lot, the second pay fourteen *cumal*s, and the third are to become exiles beyond the sea, under the rule of a harsh regimen. Any man who does not undergo penance according to this law will not only 'perish in eternity', but will be cursed by God and Adomnán, as shall those who know of the crime but do not curse him, nor bring him to justice.[529] These are strong words indeed.

This demand for seven years' penance echoes Finnian's Penitential, and the Penitential ascribed to Theodore (as shall be discussed in the following chapter), just as the imposition of exile resonates with the *Ambrosianum* and Cummian, yet none of these Penitentials make any demand for the execution or physical wounding of the sinner, nor are such extreme levies placed on the family of the offender. The various penitential texts are concerned only with the individual, whereas this directive targets the criminal(s), their collaborators, and kin. It would appear that the text wishes to engender a strong social pressure to bring the offender to justice, and has extended the culpability of the deed beyond that of the individual who committed the crime: society (or more specifically, the kin-group)[530] is held responsible not only for enforcing the law, but also for crime itself. While early Irish law does allow a homicide to be put to death, it would usually only be if payment was not forthcoming, not as a matter of course.[531] The 'angel' may here be drawing from Exodus 21:23 which stipulates the payment of a life for a life. The demand for dismemberment appears to be an innovation, as is the doubling of the payment in lieu of execution.

The question we are left with, then, is whether this section is part of the original text, or a later development.[532] The fact that the directive is the only part of the document written in Latin, and is an explicitly divine command, supports the latter theory. Given the context of the law as a whole, one cannot help but consider that beneath the angelic directive lies an original canon; given that there is a specific decree on the killing of clerics and young boys

[529] 'Qui autem feminam ab ipso die mortificauerit penitentiam secundum legem non agens non solum Deo 7 Adomnano in aeternum peribit [et] maledictus erit...', Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §33.
[530] The *fine* (kin-group) played an essential legal role in early medieval Ireland, including paying for the crimes and debts of its members, and failure to meet one's obligations to one's kin could result in the loss of all legal protection; Kelly, *Law*, pp. 12-13
[531] *Ibid.*, p. 127 and pp. 216-217.
[532] As noted previously, Ní Dhonnchadha advocates its (near-) originality, while Dumville and Ó Néill suggest that it is a product of Raphoe; see n. 497 and n. 504.

with penalties of a similar scale for killing women,[533] and that later in the text we are provided with the punishment for a woman who kills,[534] it would be quite odd if Adomnán had not included some penalty for the killing of women by men in his original enactment. In this light, we may consider the demand for seven *cumal*s and seven years penance for killing a woman, at the very least, to be genuine. The requirement to execute a female homicide (albeit in a roundabout way) would seem to suggest that the stipulation to execute male culprits is original, as does the treatment of the killers of innocents in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*.[535] On the other hand, there is no analogue to the dismemberment of killers demanded by the angel either in the remainder of the *Cáin* itself or the *Life of Columba*,[536] nor for escaping death by paying double the fine. With all this in mind, the following hypothesis may offer a plausible scenario for the construction of this particular element of the law: Adomnán's original decree, which demanded penance, a fine, and execution, was heavily elaborated at some later point, making the killing of women an especially heinous crime, and was transposed into the voice of an angel, who would have 'spoken' in Latin, to add divine sanction to its enactment, with the option to avoid execution by paying higher fines and undertaking longer penance.

4.2.4 Impact

Considering the fact that we have no evidence for the enforcement of the *Cáin*, and that the signature of a king did not ensure his successor's compliance, we might wonder if this promulgation had any lasting results. We might assume that the underwriting of the law by the clerical signatories would be deemed a permanent condition of acceptance at their home establishments, especially at (and presumably by) Iona and its dependencies. This recognition, however, was of limited use: the clergy were numbered among the targets the law intended to protect, and so it was in their own interest to advocate its enactment. While this protection may only have lasted in a given kingdom during the reign of the signatory

[533] Compare Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §33 and §35.
[534] *Ibid.*, §45.
[535] Columba condemns a certain killer of innocents to immediate death in *VC*, II 25. If we also consider Columba himself as an *innocens*, his attempted murder by Lam Dess, who later dies by the same weapon he used against the saint, could also serve as an illustration of the precepts of the *Cáin*; see *VC*, II 24. Both of these examples are discussed in detail below.
[536] Indeed, early Irish secular law does not appear to have employed mutilation as a punishment, a penalty which only appears after the Norman Conquest, an indication, perhaps, that this element of the *cáin* is from a later period; on the lack of judicial mutilation in early Ireland, see Kelly, *Law*, p. 221.

king (or at least until it was politically convenient for him to ignore it),[537] it does appear that Adomnán expected the law to be an enduring fixture: it is explicitly stated twice that it is a permanent law.[538] Thirty years after the promulgation at Birr the relics of Adomnán were brought to Ireland, and his *Cáin* was issued once again.[539] By this time all but three of the identified original signatories had died.[540] If Iona had sought from the outset to ensure the widespread endurance of the law it would not be unreasonable for it to seek new signatories on a regular basis, and, on the contrary, if the law had failed in securing the observance of subsequent kings, the thirtieth anniversary of its first promulgation would seem like an opportune time to remind the secular leaders of the divine providence of Adomnán's *Cáin*. Indeed we cannot gauge the level to which the law was enforced; the letter of the law may have been followed in some kingdoms, but paid lip-service in others, or the defence of innocents may have been encouraged, but the payment of fines to Iona ignored. The re-promulgation may have been a political act; the law, and the payments due to Iona, rested ultimately on the authority of the two most senior promoters: Adomnán and Loingsech mac Óengusa, both of whom were members of the Cenél Conaill. The year the *Cáin* was re-issued, Flaithbertach mac Loingsig of the Cenél Conaill defeated Áed Allán of the Cenél nEoghain at Druimm Fornochta,[541] which may suggest that the promulgation of a law signed by the victor's father was an attempt to reassert both his own and his monastic supporter's authority. In 733 Flaithbertach was deposed by Áed Allán.[542] In the year of Áed's ascension, the Law of Patrick was promoted throughout Ireland.[543] These two events cannot be unrelated, considering the close alliance between the Cenél nEogain and Armagh from the middle of the eighth century,[544] and their respective rivalries with the Cenél Conaill and Iona. The second promulgation of the *Cáin Adomnáin* does not, however, offer us any insight into

[537] A fifth of the signatories remain unidentified, and of these 60% had died within a decade of the synod of Birr; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The guarantor-list of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', p. 215

[538] The law is referred to as a 'bithcáin co bráth', literally a 'perpetual-regulation/law until Doomsday'; Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §28. The enduring force of the law is reiterated after the list of signatories, stating that laymen and clerics both have agreed 'to fulfil the Law of Adomnán until Doomsday', 'Tocuitchetar tra huli laechaib $_7$ cléirchibh ógh cána Adomnán do comalnad co brádh'; *ibid*., §29.

[539] AU 727.5.

[540] 84% of the identified were dead within two decades of Birr, only five survived until 725, and two until 735; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The guarantor-list of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', p. 215.

[541] AU, 727.2, and AT, 726.2.

[542] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 573.

[543] The text of the Law of Patrick has not survived, but it was promulgated on several occasions, often with clear political overtones, and was, apparently, concerned with offences against the clergy; see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 198-199; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 63; Kelly, *Law*, pp. 281-282; and AU 734.3, 737.10, 767.10, 783.9, 799.9, 806.5, 811.1, 823.5, 825.14, and 836.4.

[544] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 51.

whether or not, or to what degree, the law had been enforced since its initial proclamation at Birr in 697.

4.3 The *Vita Columbae*

4.3.1 Composition and context

Composed sometime after 696 and before 704,[545] Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* is quite unlike the hagiographies of Brigit and Patrick discussed previously. Written shortly after the works of Tírechán and Muirchú, which were themselves composed after Cogitosus' *Vita Brigitae*, Adomnán's work does not follow the standard pattern for hagiographical texts as inspired by Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*.[546] This pattern was partly biographical in the modern sense – it followed a chronological order – while also being biographical in a Late Antique fashion – displaying the manner of life of the subject, and their role as an instrument of God.[547] Adomnán, however, does not present Columba's life in chronological order, a fact that he admits from the outset.[548] The structure of the work more closely resembles the *Vita Benedicti* that Gregory the Great included in his *Dialogi*, organised along the similar lines of prophecy, miracles of power, and visions of souls,[549] while also drawing stylistic influence from Sulpicius and Evagrius' Latin translation of the *Vita Antonii*.[550] Charles-Edwards argues that, although Adomnán was clearly inspired by Gregory, his composition is no slavish copy, but a creative development of the style, a move away from the Hellenistic technique of Sulpicius emulated by Muirchú.[551] Adomnán is, in comparison to other contemporary Irish

[545] Adomnán must have written the work after his visit to Northumbria in 688 and before his death in 704, probably between 696 and 697, as he implies he had been abbot for seventeen years at the time of writing, and he may have wanted to complete the text before the centenary of Columba's death; see Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 54-55.
[546] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The structure and purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*' in Wooding, Jonathan M., *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), p. 205.
[547] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[548] '… licet praepostero ordine…', *VC*, I 1.
[549] Charles-Edwards, 'The structure and purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', p. 215.
[550] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 58-59.
[551] Charles-Edwards, 'The structure and purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', p. 205, and p. 215.

hagiographers, uniquely concerned with the reliability of his work, frequently referring to 'learned men', 'informed people', and written texts at Iona as his sources.[552]

By virtue of the fact that this work was written in Latin we can conclude that, at a very basic level, its intended audience was ecclesiastical. How broad Adomnán expected this audience to be and to what end the *Vita Columbae* was written are matters of some debate. We might consider at first that Adomnán was simply writing for his own community, collecting tales of the founder for the edification of his monks, but it is clear that he had a larger body of episodes from Columba's life to choose from than what he has recorded. In the third book we find that a later scribe, Dorbbéne, inserted a prophecy by the founder of Iona taken from the book of Cumméne the White, leaving us to wonder what else may have been omitted by Adomnán in his shaping of the character of Columba.[553] If the intended audience was indeed Iona and its dependencies, we might first imagine the work to be didactic, a tool for the education of the monks of the *familia Columbae*. Many of the tales related do concern learning, but are often also illustrations of the founder's prophetic powers. For example, in the first book are presented three incidents concerning manuscript production: a single mistake in a copy of a psalter, a book falling into a bucket of water, and, finally, the spilling of ink, each of which Columba foresees.[554] These prophecies may be evidence of the value placed on writing and copying at Iona, but Adomnán's intention might have been to show that his subject's prophetic power was not limited to distant events,[555] but was a constant blessing which could expose even the mundane. Sharpe also believes that the *Vita*, at its core, is firmly directed at the *familia Columbae* with the aim of reinforcing its sense of community, as the majority of the episodes take place on Iona, and little reference is made to the Pictish missions or to the great political debates of the time, though he concedes that Adomnán may have expected his work to have been read outside the Columban federation as Columba's cult grew, mirroring in some small way the success of Sulpicius and Athanasius.[556] In contrast to this view of political indifference, one example of the founder's close relationship to Áedán mac Gabráin, whom he ordained as king,[557] and for whose victory in battle he prayed,[558]

[552] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 56. For example, Adomnán informs us that what he sets down is based on older written works and the testimony of trustworthy old men; *VC*, *Secunda praefatio*.
[553] *VC*, III 5. On the relationship between the *Vita Columbae* and Cumméne's *liber de virtutibus Columbae*, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 24-6, and pp. 134-140.
[554] *VC*, I 23-25.
[555] For example, a vision of the destruction of an Italian city was revealed to Columba; *ibid*., I 28.
[556] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 63-64.
[557] *VC*, III 5.
[558] *Ibid*., I 8.

should be noted. Equally, the range of Columba's travels stretch from Clonmacnoise to Pictland, and he appears in a dream on the eve of a battle in Northumbria,[559] indicative, perhaps, of the geographically wide reader- and listenership Adomnán had hoped to garner.

In opposition to the idea that Adomnán was writing as part, and on behalf, of the community of Iona, Herbert believes that he was to some degree removed from his own organisation, writing the *Vita* in his own defence, a statement of his own loyalty to the memory of Columba and to the community, though he encouraged the adoption of the Roman Easter over the traditional calculation.[560] If such was the case, a reference to the controversial debate, other than Columba's prophesy that such an issue would arise,[561] might be expected. Given that Adomnán includes this vision, it is strange that Columba's opinion on the controversy was not offered; it may have been that while he himself followed the Roman calculation, Adomnán did not dismiss the traditional method out of hand. Had he wished, the *Vita* would have been a convenient tool to lend the founder's support to his cause of reform. The ninth abbot may have hoped to unite the geographically dispersed community in a time of controversy, but Adomnán's work was also designed to enhance the memory of Columba outside Iona and ensure his position as a great saint.[562] As a work in defence of Iona, Picard argues that Adomnán's primary goal was to write an account of the life of Columba to serve as a moral guide for the Christian community, aimed at Northumbrian, Irish, and Continental audiences, and as a counter to the claims of Armagh and Kildare.[563] Herbert, however, disagrees with the notion that Adomnán had a Continental audience in mind or that the *Vita Columbae* was a defence against the rise of Armagh and Kildare, as the *familia Columbae* had the secure support of the Cenél Conaill, placing it at 'the forefront of the Irish ecclesiastical scene at the time'.[564] How Herbert imagined this association with the Cenél Conaill countered the claims of the Uí Dúnlanige and Kildare is unclear, but there was an obvious rivalry with Armagh, which had the support of the Cenél nEoghain, who opposed the patrons of Iona. Adomnán and Iona may have enjoyed the support of the pre-eminent Uí Néill faction, but it seems unlikely that the abbot would be unaware of how quickly the fortunes of kings change, and as such the *Vita Columbae* may well have stood as an independent

[559] *Ibid.*, I 1.
[560] Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 142-143.
[561] *VC*, I 3.
[562] Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 144.
[563] J.-M. Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 172-77. Picard believes the *Vita Columbae* to be a defence of the traditions of the *familia Columbae* in the face of mounting pressures from Armagh, the Roman mission in Britain, and between Hiberno-Frankish monasteries.
[564] Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 146.

assertion of the power and prestige of the *familia Columbae*. Such an affirmation may be seen in the passage where Columba visits Clonmacnoise,[565] an episode which Adomnán may be using to reinforce Columban authority over the establishment.[566] Furthermore, considering the long list of guarantors of his *Cáin*, and both Adomnán's and Columba's personal familial connections to an important dynasty, it would seem highly unlikely that he would not use the *Vita Columbae* for political, among other, ends.[567] We can only conclude, then, that the *Vita Columbae* was a work of many aims; more than a record of the deeds of the founder, Adomnán sought to extol the virtues of Columba both as an example to other Christians and to legitimise the claims of his foundation, combining this with an effort to remind kings and other ecclesiastics what they owed to Iona, both spiritually and materially. Considering these points, it seems clear that Adomnán would have expected his audience to include, at the very least, his own community and its dependencies, but also their secular patrons throughout Ireland and Britain. Indeed, many of the same goals could easily have been behind the motivations of Muirchú, Tírechán, Cogitosus, and the compilers of the *Bethu Brigte*, *Vita Prima*, and *Liber Angeli*.

The *Vita* was not simply a work of institutional hubris designed to remind the *familia Columbae* of the greatness of its founder (as though they would forget!), but a skilled piece of political and theological manoeuvring by Adomnán to not only remind others of the debts owed to Iona and how the *familia Columbae* could lend its spiritual aid to a worthy king, but as a means to manipulate these debts and divine mandate into practical outcomes for the community and those it protected.

4.3.2 The *Life* of Columba

Adomnán refers to penance in seven separate episodes in his hagiography of Columba. Two of the tales tell of unsuccessful penitents, three relate a successful restoration, and the final two are ambiguous. As we might now have come to anticipate, we are told little of what was expected of these penitents. In the first incident, that of the hidden sin of Colgu's mother, we are simply told that, though at first she denied the sin, after rigorous questioning she

[565] *VC*, I 3.
[566] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Adomnán and the abbacy of Clonmacnoise: historical needs, literary narratives', *The Innes Review*, 57:2 (2006), pp. 211-212.
[567] Concerning Adomnán's political intentions, see Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*', pp. 161-163.

eventually admitted it.[568] Colgu's mother then undertook the penance prescribed by Columba (for he had prophetic knowledge of her misdeed), which restored her.[569] Adomnán's depiction of the penitential process reveals a particular sequence of events: first the individual is thoroughly questioned, confession is then offered, followed by penance, after which the individual is redeemed.

A subsequent passage portrays a different method. We are told of a *sapiens* by the name of Féchna who comes to Iona, falls before Columba and, weeping and lamenting, confesses his sins.[570] Columba says that his sins are forgiven, and sends him to the penitent colony at Tiree under the rule of Baithéne.[571] Here, in contrast to the sequence of events depicting the confession of Colgu's mother, forgiveness is granted after confession but apparently before penance is complete. It would appear that, in this instance, confession and the shedding of tears is sufficient to gain forgiveness, but that penance is a separate issue, whereas for Colgu's mother penance is the path to absolution. It may be that Féchna's weeping and wailing offered ample evidence for his remorse, whereas others had to be guided in their correction: Colgu's recalcitrant mother had to be interrogated thoroughly before admitting her sin, and (as we shall see presently) the Unhappy Man had to be told by Columba that weeping and wailing were a requirement. It may also have been the case that nature of their penance was different: the *sapiens* may have been engaging in a penitential practice designed to propel him along a path of purification, where the mother was simply expunging the spiritual stain of a specific sin.

---

[568] *VC*, I 17. It is interesting to note that Colgu, who appears to be a disciple of Columba's on Iona, could act as a confessor and enforce the saint's will in his homeland among the Uí Fiachrach. *Synodus I S. Patricii* §24 and §26 suggest that an *aduena* cannot perform religious functions without the permission of the local bishop. After he secures his mother's confession, Colgu returns to Iona and asks Columba of his own fate; the saint reveals a sign by which Colgu will know he will soon die, noting that it will occur while he is the head of a church in his own country. Considering this, it may have been the case that Colgu already held some ecclesiastical position in his homeland that permitted him the authority to hear confession, and was simply visiting Iona when Columba informed him of his mother's sin. The pastoral jurisdiction of a bishop was known as a *paruchia*, and, by extension, the community and churches within that jurisdiction. This was a geographically discreet territory, which stood in contrast to dispersed monastic federations like the *familia Columbae*; see Colmán Etchingham, 'The implications of *paruchia*', *Ériu*, 44 (1993), pp. 146-147. The division of power between abbots and bishops in the early medieval Irish context is somewhat obscure, but, in essence, the bishop was responsible for the pastoral care of a specific region or people, while an abbot was a 'paternal authority', a landlord, and the 'heir' of a founder-saint of a monastic community which could be widely dispersed; see Richard Sharpe, 'Some problems concerning the organization of the Church in early medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 262-265.

[569] '…et iuxta sancti iudicationem penitudinem agens sanata', *VC*, I 17. The Andersons use 'was restored', while Sharpe translates *sanata* as 'was healed'; compare Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, p. 43, and Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 124. In either situation, it is clear that spiritual healing or restoration is implied.

[570] *VC*, I 30. Sharpe notes that a *sapiens* is a term often used to denote a renowned scholar or teacher, presumably of a religious capacity; Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 292, n. 139.

[571] *VC*, I 30.

When Columba attends a gathering at Coleraine, a variety of gifts are placed before him for his blessing.[572] He refuses to bless one of them until the gift-giver repents for his sin of avarice.[573] The man, Columb, immediately does penance before the saint, stating that he would thenceforth practise liberality, and was instantly cured of this vice as he was a *uir sapiens*.[574] Soon afterwards, another man, Brendan, whose gift the saint praised, kneels before Columba seeking a blessing; the saint reproaches him for certain sins and the man repents, promising to amend his ways.[575] Both men are thus corrected and healed.[576] Like Féchna, it is sufficient that Columb is a *uir sapiens* who agreed to mend his ways, and Brendan, like Colgu's mother, must promise to undertake penance and improve his lifestyle; nothing further is demanded of them, possibly due to the relative inconsequence of their sins.[577]

Adomnán relates the prophecy concerning Nemán, who is referred to as a false penitent.[578] Columba relaxes the dietary rules on the island of Hinba for a day, even for the penitents, but Nemán, who was among them, refuses, which angers the saint, who proceeds to predict that Nemán will one day return to the world and resort to eating the flesh of a stolen mare in the company of thieves.[579] The saint's prophecy comes true, but it is not clear if Nemán abandoned the life of a penitent, or if he had completed a set period of penance at Hinba before returning to the world. Nemán is not explicitly punished for his acts; Columba merely foresees a future where the former penitent is in the company of thieves and is reduced to eating horsemeat, which is, presumably, indicative of his falling into sin. Adomnán's designation of Nemán as a false penitent may be a retroactive insertion; there is

[572] *Ibid*., I 50. Once more we meet the interesting issue of jurisdiction: Columba seems to have been allowed to hear confession and impose penance in the territory of the bishop of Coleraine. It may have been the case that Columba was granted a certain amount of deference as the head of Iona, a member of an important political dynasty, a consequence of his renown as a visionary and pious miracle-worker, or as a literary device employed by Adomnán to illustrate his foundation's dominance.

[573] '…nisi prius ueram de peccato auaritiae penitudinem egerit', '…unless first he truly carries out penance concerning the sin of avarice'; *ibid*., I 50.

[574] '...et coram sancto flexis genibus penitentiam agit...'; *ibid*.

[575] '...penitudinem gerens, de cetero se emendaturum promissit', '...bearing penance, thenceforth he promised he would amend himself'; *ibid*.

[576] 'Et sic uterque de propriis emendates et sanatus est uitiis'; *ibid*.

[577] For a cleric who had fallen into sin of greed, Finnian demands a state of penitence, of weeping day and night until the evil is driven out, and a cure by contraries, which is to say, liberality; *Pen. Vinn.*, §29. Under Cummian, alms (which may be understood as liberality) and fasting are the recommended penance for avarice; *Paen. Cumm.*, III §3. As a *uir sapiens*, Columb may have been an ecclesiastical scholar, and so may have already known the required penance, explaining his uncalled for promise to practice liberality, mitigating any need for Columba to pass judgement. Equally, Brendan's gift had been praised by Columba for its generosity, which may have been understood as a demonstration of his faithfulness and obedience to the Church.

[578] *VC*, I 21.

[579] *Ibid*. An Irish synod decreed that eating horseflesh carried with it a penance of four years on bread and water; *Canones Hibernenses I*, Bieler, *Penitentials*, §13.

nothing to indicate pretence in his penance, and indeed he wishes to maintain its rigour in spite of Columba's moderation.

We are told of the Unhappy Man who killed his brother and slept with his mother.[580] At first Columba refuses to see the man, going so far as to deny him permission to set foot on Iona. The man swears that he will not take food until he is seen by the saint,[581] who relents, at which point the man promises to fulfil the demands of the laws of penance.[582] Columba tells the man that if he does twelve years of penance among the British, and never returns to Ireland, perhaps God may pardon his sin. This is not a simple case of murder and sexual misconduct, but fratricide combined with incest,[583] crimes that Columba does not appear to think can be atoned for.[584] In any event, there is no indication that this punishment was exceptional or unjust; while Columba may have foreseen the man's failure in completing the penance, it would seem unduly cruel of him to impose a penalty he knew could not be completed. As the leader of a community and an example to others, the abbot of Iona might have demanded a harsh punishment, but not an impossible one, and so, at the very least, we may assume that this was an acceptable decision at the time when Adomnán was writing.

In another incident, a man arrives on Iona seeking physical healing, and Columba remarks that it would be better if he spent his time 'bearing penance for his sins' as he will

[580] *VC*, I 22.
[581] This threat of fasting against one of noble status is an interesting reference to native secular law. A *nemed* (a cast of sacred nobles) is exempt from many conditions of early Irish law, but they can be forced to concede to justice through legal fasting; see Kelly, *Law*, p. 9, and pp. 182-183.
[582] 'Tum deinde miser in litore flexis genibus leges penetentiae expleturum se promisit, iuxta sancti iudicationem'; *VC*, I 22.
[583] We are not told if the offender is a layman or cleric, only that he is a *miser*, but we might assume that he is of the laity as failing to report his clerical position would be curious omission on Adomnán's behalf. If the Unhappy Man was a layman, for murder, under Finnian, he would suffer three years penance and offer the fruits of his penance to the Church; *Pen. Vinn.*, §35. On the matter of incest Finnian is silent. However, in the *Dauid*, §11 it is stated that anyone who puts another to death or commits fornication with their sister must do three years penance; under this ruling the Unhappy Man would have earned a total of six years penance (presuming that the penalty for incest is the same for mother and sister). Cummian also imposes three years of penance with perpetual exile for the sin of defiling one's mother, *Paen. Cumm.*, II §7, which appears to be drawn from *Sinodus Luci*, §6. As we have seen, Cummian wrote that premeditated murdered carried a penance of the surrendering of arms and being dead unto the world; *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §5. One might imagine that Finnian's Penitential may have influenced Columba, given that Adomnán tells us that the latter was taught by the former; see *VC*, II 1. Concerning the identity of the Finnian in question, see Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 11. The first collection of the 'Irish Canons' decrees that the penance for parricide is fourteen years, or seven if committed in ignorance, with the punishment for general homicide being seven years, adding the caveat that Monochoma demands ten; *Canones Hibernenses*, I §1-3. This 'Monochoma' may be Manchán, founder and abbot of Liath Mancháin, who died in 665; see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 9, and AU 665.5. While Columba's decision does not neatly align with any of these prescriptions, it would seem that it was generally understood that killing a family member was a far more grave sin than killing an unrelated individual.
[584] '…forsan deus peccato ignoscat tuo', '… *perhaps* God will forgive your sin' (emphasis added); *VC*, I 22.

die by the end of the week.[585] The man does not heed the saint, departs the island having received what he sought, and soon expires as predicted. This episode reveals that Iona offered not only spiritual remedies, but also physical ones, though the former were presumably considered more important when the eternity of the afterlife, and the possibility of having to battle demons,[586] was weighed against the brevity of a mortal life. Columba thought that a man's life was better spent in some form of penitential purgation of sin in preparation for death. This illustration of Columba's prophetic vision is an interesting example of how not all who came to Iona sought it out for religious purposes, or, perhaps, saw any value in the confession of sin.

The most substantial penitential episode concerns Librán of the reed-plot.[587] Arriving on Iona soon after putting on clerical dress, staying as a guest in the community's hospice, an unnamed man confesses all of his sins to Columba, promising to do all the necessary penance, which the saint calculates to be seven years on the island of Tiree. It should be noted that Adomnán states that this individual agreed to fulfil the demands of the 'laws of penance',[588] which may be suggestive of a penitential handbook; these 'laws' are also mentioned earlier in the *Vita Columbae* in the tale of the Unhappy Man.[589] The sojourner tells the saint that he killed a man, broke his oath, and escaped his legal servitude.[590] Columba tells him first to complete the seven years of penance, and then to return to him, at which time the saint informs him of the second stage of his endeavour; the penitent man must make good the secular commitments he abandoned when he escaped his lawful bondage. With the aid of the saint he neatly discharges his duties and obligations, and swiftly returns to Iona, again with the aid of Columba through a miraculous wind. Columba christens the man 'Librán' as he is now free of all of his burdens. Librán commits himself to a monastic vow and returns to the place where he endured his seven years of penance.

---

[585] 'Cui oportunis erat uerm de peccatis hodie penitudinem gerere...'; *ibid*., I 27.

[586] On several occasions Columba has visions of people having to battle with demons upon their death, some of whom are aided by angels, with the prayers of Columba and his monks, as they attempt to rise to heaven, and their own righteousness in life plays a role in their success in defeating their adversaries; *ibid*., I 1, 35, and 39, and III 10 and 13.

[587] *Ibid*., II 39.

[588] 'Eadam hora omnia sua peccata leges penitentiae flexis in terram genibus se impleturum promisit'; *ibid*.

[589] *Ibid*., I 22. It is interesting to note that the description of the Unhappy Man's submission to the decision of Columba is quite similar to Librán's; compare *ibid*. I 22 and II 39.

[590] *Ibid*., II 39. Under native secular law, restitution for an illegal killing could be made by the payment of a fine that consisted of a fixed penalty for homicide (the *éraic* or *cró*, valued at seven *cumal*s), added to the honour-price (*lóg n-enech*) of the family of the slain individual. If the culprit, or indeed his family, could not (or would not!) pay the fine, the victim's family could take the offender as a captive until payment was made, execute him, or sell him into slavery; see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 125-127. It would appear that, in the present case, a lord (who may have been a relative) paid the fine, which compelled Librán to enter into his service.

The curious fact that Librán's sin of killing is revealed after his penitential term has been determined has been explained as Adomnán confusing the sequence of events, since Librán apparently undertook the seven year term required by Finnian for a cleric who had committed the sin of homicide.[591] This presumes three things: that Adomnán was mistaken, that Librán was a cleric, and that he undertook the penance of a cleric. As I shall demonstrate later in the thesis,[592] I believe a good case can be made for the trope of laymen taking on clerical garb to be a euphemism for submitting to fixed-term penitential discipline while not actually taking clerical orders; in short, the layman adopts the austere dress of a cleric as a symbol of his penance but returns to the lay lifestyle once his term is completed. With this in mind, the argument can be made for Librán not being a cleric, which would mean that he did not undertake the penance of a cleric, but of a layman. If Finnian's Penitential, or something similar, was employed at Iona, Librán would have only suffered three years of penance for the sin of killing,[593] the remaining four years prescribed by Columba being for other, undisclosed sins; the fact that he does so in isolation from the lay world and is reconciled at Easter may also resonate with Finnian.[594] Having confessed all his sins, which Columba decides cumulatively require seven years of penance, Librán then asks the Abbot his advice not on a penitential matter, but on a secular one – he is not seeking a path to absolution, but map to guide him out of the legal quandary he will be in once his penitential term is complete. This would serve to demonstrate Columba's authority not only as a religious figure, but as one well-versed in Irish law, and explains why Librán queries the saint after his confession and why his secular responsibilities were fulfilled after he had been redeemed to the altar. If Librán was not a cleric and did not undertake the penance of a cleric, and the explanation offered above for the sequence of events is accepted, then Adomnán did not 'forget' that Librán had confessed his sins, rather he skilfully added another arrow to Columba's quiver of talents.

The final direct reference to penance in the *Life* of Columba concerns a young pupil of the saint, Berchán Mes loen, who witnesses a divine apparition in Columba's house, the sight of which would have killed him had the saint not intervened.[595] The saint tells the boy that he will live a luxurious life in his homeland, but that if he does penance before he dies he

[591] It has been suggested that Adomnán 'forgot' that Librán had confessed all of his sins to Columba, and that 'we must excuse Adomnán for this slight flaw in his narrative'; Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, p. 154, n. 180; and Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 338, n. 311.
[592] See below, pp. 214-216.
[593] *Pen. Vinn.*, §35.
[594] See n. 208.
[595] *VC*, III 21.

will receive God's mercy as a pupil of Columba.[596] The details of the penance remain unsaid, but all unfolds as predicted.

Aside from these clear references to penance, there is a possible allusion to penitential practice in one other episode. This concerns Áed Dub, a murderous man who had killed many, including Diarmait mac Cerbaill, whom Adomnán claimed to have been ordained by God's will to be king of all Ireland.[597] Áed Dub was brought in clerical garb to the monastic site of *Artchain* on Tiree by Findchán, who hoped that Áed would remain there with him as part of a pilgrimage for several years, and who had inappropriately ordained him.[598] Columba predicts that Áed will return to his homicidal ways, and would suffer an unpleasant triple death.[599] We are not explicitly told that Áed is a penitent, but it seems a strong possibility that this is what Findchán had intended considering that he brought this slayer of men on pilgrimage to Tiree with the expectation of staying there for several years. While penance may have been the motive of Findchán, Áed may have relocated to Tiree as a self-imposed exile during a period of political disadvantage.[600]

As with the Brigitine and Patrician traditions, it seems clear that a certain degree of violence is accepted by Columba – or at least by Adomnán in his shaping of the memory of the first abbot of Iona. From the very beginning we are informed that, through prayer, Columba could secure victory for his chosen champion, providing the example of Oswald, who defeated Cadwallon at the battle of Heavenfield, and who was 'ordained by God as emperor of the whole of Britain'.[601] Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riada, is also explicitly

---

[596] '...ut quia noster sis alumnus lacrimosam ante exitum agas penitudinem...'; *ibid*.

[597] *Ibid*., I 36. Áed Dub mac Suibni of the Dál nAraidi, over-king of the Ulaid, died in 588. His killing of Diarmait mac Cerbaill in 565 may have been a consequence of mere rivalry between hereditary enemies, but it was 'raised to a mythological plane' by later writers; this reference by Adomnán to Diarmait is surprising as it was Diarmait against whom Columba prayed at the battle of Cúl Dreimne: see Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 94-99 and pp. 109-111; and AU 561.1.

[598] Adomnán identifies the monastery as belonging to Findchán; *VC*, I 36. Tiree appears to have supported several monastic sites, of which only *Campus Lunge* was part of the *familia Columbae*; *Artcháin* was an independent site founded by Findcháin; see Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 279-280, n. 107; and Aidan Mac Donald, 'Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and the early churches of Tiree' in Wooding, Jonathan M., *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 224-225. Áed's ordination was considered inappropriate as the presiding bishop dared not lay his hand on Áed's head until Findchán had placed his right hand there, and, furthermore, Findchán's relationship towards Áed is described as *carnaliter amans*; *VC*, I 36. This phase appears to imply that Findchán loved Áed as a member of his family, rather than a carnal desire; see Michael Meckler, 'Carnal love and priestly ordination on sixth-century Tiree', *The Innes Review*, 51.2 (2000), pp. 101-103.

[599] *VC*, I 36.

[600] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 297-298, n. 158.

[601] *VC*, I 1. The underlying message of this episode may have been to remind the Northumbrians of Adomnán's day of the debt they owed to Columba, and by association, his successors, see Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*', p. 174. Bede makes no mention of the founder of Iona in his account of Oswald's

supported in battle by Columba, who suddenly summons his monks to pray for the king's victory.[602] Columba's involvement in the battle of Cúl Dreimne, though not recorded by Adomnán, is mentioned in the Annals of Ulster and of Tigernach, where it is noted that the victors, led by the founder of Iona's cousin and king of the Cenél Conaill, Ainmire mac Sétna, prevailed as a result of the saint's prayers.[603] Such examples lead to the implication that a king's hand in such bloodshed, and Columba's undisguised support of it, is not sinful if it is done on behalf of God's plan, or (perhaps more cynically) by the saint's family, allies, and spiritual vassals. In support of this, we are told of certain laymen who, though guilty of bloodshed, only needed to sing certain songs in praise of Columba to be divinely guarded in battle; those among them who did not sing the songs of praise perished.[604] This would suggest that Columba's protection could be granted to anyone, sinful or not, ordained by God or not, if they only humbly ask him for it. This transaction calls to mind a secular client-lord relationship; it was Columba's duty as a spiritual lord to aid those who submitted to his patronage, while no such obligation was expected towards those had not been offered the appropriate homage. In such a light, it would appear that Adomnán is suggesting that Columba's protection is available to any who seek it, and those who do not risk death.

While there are several other depictions of bloodshed in this text that appear in a negative fashion and may at first appear to conflict with the preceding point, it would, on closer examination, seem that Columba is not condemning bloodshed in general, but specific forms of it. Áed Sláine, king of Brega, was promised the kingship of all Ireland by Columba, but was warned that if he killed a member of his own family, his rule would be limited in both time and territory;[605] kin-slaying is the key sin here. Áed Sláine became high-king in 598, two years after which he was responsible for the killing of his nephew, a crime for which he was himself killed in vengeance by the son of his nephew four years later.[606] Why Columba (or rather Adomnán in his subject's voice) would offer such a great honour to a

---

erection of a cross on the site while preparing for battle, which may in itself be a political statement that Oswald owed his kingdom to none but God; *HE*, III 1-2.

[602] *VC*, I 8. As with the Oswald incident, this may have served to remind the Dál Riada of Columba's association with their royal line. The bell of Iona is rung only four times in the *Vita*: *ibid*., I 8, II 42, III 13 and III 23. The first three are situations where the monks of Iona are brusquely called to pray for the protection of an individual or individuals, while the last is a reference to a standard indication of church service.

[603] See AU 560.3 and 561.1-2. The Annals of Tigernach also records the prayer Columba is said to have uttered; AT, 560.1. The cause, in part, of the battle appears to have been the violation of a guarantee of safety given by Columba for Cornán, son of the king of the Connachta, who was killed by Diarmait mac Cerbaill. Adomnán may have been hoping to repair the relationship between Iona and Diarmait's descendant in his work; see above, n. 597.

[604] *VC*, I 1.

[605] *Ibid*., I 14.

[606] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, p. 276, n. 95.

dynasty that contended with his own for the high-kingship is curious; perhaps it was designed to explain the near total dominance of the Northern Uí Néill families over the title for roughly a century,[607] which was, of course, an illustration of the saint's favour.

Áed Dub, as we have seen, was a man not unfamiliar with bloodshed.[608] For committing an act in breach of God's will he ultimately suffered a triple death. Another man, known as Lám Dess, who attempted to kill Columba suffers death at the hands of a spear thrown in the saint's name.[609] Immediately following this scene we are told of an event from Columba's youth where a cruel persecutor of innocents runs a spear through a girl who had hidden under the saint's robes.[610] Columba himself pronounces death on the man, who dies immediately, an act for which Adomnán likens the patron of Iona to Peter in his power to impose death as a punishment (Acts 5:4-5).[611] Adomnán also relates an incident where Columba prophecies the death of a man who broke his trust; Feradach betrays Columba and murders a man given into his care by the saint.[612] This scene, like the one of the songs of praise, suggests a client-lord relationship, except that instead of protecting those who pay him homage, Columba may be avenging his client and an affront against his own honour. The episodes concerning the innocent girl, Feradach, and Lám Dess occur in a series which also includes the divine punishment of Ioan mac Conaill of the Cenél nGabráin who raided the property of a friend of Columba three times, and when the saint demands that he desists, he insults him and departs by sea.[613] A great wind arises and sinks the boat, and all the raiders are dragged to Hell.[614] In this scenario bloodshed is not specifically mentioned, but it is indicative of the protective role that Columba, as a lord, adopts for his friends and clients. It is clear that Columba was no stranger to violence, and Adomnán does not hide this fact, but

[607] Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 281-283.
[608] *VC*, I 36. See above, n. 597.
[609] *Ibid*., II 24.
[610] *Ibid*., II 25. Adomnán may have chosen to include this tale in the Life of Columba to reinforce his own message concerning the protection of innocents.
[611] The chapter following this may have been chosen specifically to support the claim that Columba had the power to kill with a word. Confronted alone in a dense wood by a wild boar, he commands the animal to die; *ibid*., II 26. Indeed, this power over death is again revealed when he returns a boy from the dead, a power which Adomnán specifically notes Columba shares with the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and the apostles Peter, Paul, and John; *ibid*., II 32.
[612] *Ibid*., II 23. This episode echoes an aspect of Columba's career that Adomnán neglects to mention; see above, n. 603.
[613] *Ibid*., II 22.
[614] If the *Vita Columba* is indeed acting as a hagiographical reinforcement of the *Cáin Adomnáin*, the curse cast by Columba on the raiders may have served as a demonstration of the consequences of contravening the Law, in which it is stated that those who do not uphold its regulations, and their descendents, will suffer and be dishonoured, and will not achieve Heaven, a statement that is followed by a curse invoking several apostles and saints; Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §§31-31.

rather uses it to enhance the figure of his patron. Adomnán's Columba is a man of action, sending those who deserve punishment straight to Hell, scrambling his monks to pray for a favoured king, unafraid to support bloodshed and violence against the enemies and persecutors of his clients, who included not only kings but innocents. This may have served as a reminder to contemporary readers of the *Vita* that Iona had powerful friends, and that the wrath of Columba could be swift and violent.

4.4 *Canones Adomnani*

The *Canones Adomnani* has little to say about penance or bloodshed, but it does offer what may have been two interesting penitential conundrums. This text is a short series of regulations, primarily concerned with the cleanliness of food and issues of hygiene,[615] which survive in six Breton manuscripts, none of which was written before the ninth century.[616] As the text was written in Latin (unlike the predominantly vernacular *Cáin Adomnáin*), it can be assumed that the intended audience was a religious community. The connection of the canons to Adomnán of Iona rests solely on the appearance of his name in the title.[617] The attribution to Adomnán does not necessarily indicate his participation or consent; the ascription may have been attached long after his death, appealing to the authority of an esteemed abbot,[618] if indeed it was Adomnán of Iona to whom the title refers. Bieler states that the style of the canons bear little resemblance to that of Adomnán's other works, but may have been enacted under his authority,[619] while Kenney bluntly states that there is no evidence to suggest a connection to Adomnán, and the suggestion that the canons were enacted under his authority is 'a pure guess'.[620] In contrast to Bieler's caution and Kenney's dismissal, O'Loughlin has argued that there is no reason to doubt the attribution of the *Canones Adomnani* to the abbot

[615] Two editions were consulted for the purposes of this investigation: *Canones Adomnani*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 176-181; and *Canones Adomnani*, in Pádraig Ó Néill and David N. Dumville (eds. and trans.), *Cáin Adomnáin and Canones Adomnani* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 2-19.
[616] Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 12-15.
[617] One copy, B^1 (Bp), omits the *titulum*, while the others carry variations of 'Adomnán'; see Bieler, *Can. Ad*., *apparatus*, p. 176, and Ó Néill and Dumville, *Canones Adomnani* , p. 3, nn. 1-2.
[618] The penitential attributed to Theodore offers a similar case whereby later a scholar gathered together a series of teachings which may indeed have been offered by the named authority and attempted to assert a certain structure upon them that was not original; the nature of 'Theodore's Penitential' will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
[619] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 9.
[620] Kenney, *Sources*, p. 245.

if Iona, stating that the *Canones* compliments the *Cáin*, and that such a figure, as the leader of a monastic establishment, could create a series of rules for his own religious community just as easily as for the whole of society.[621] Examining the text itself, we find very little material which can be readily localised to any specific location or author.[622] It must be noted that there are several other Adomnáns who might considered as candidates for the authorship of the canons: Bishop Adomnán of Ráith Maige Aenaig,[623] Adamnán, son of Alddail, and Adomnán of Coldingham. The holyman of Coldingham was a contemporary of the abbot of Iona (Bede records a prophecy the former revealed to Æbbe, abbess of Coldingham, who died late in the seventh century); he may be dismissed as there is no other record of him, and he is described as nothing more than a monk of particular austerity.[624] The son of Alddail may be discounted due to his lack of an ecclesiastical title and the fact that he died in battle, which betrays a secular life.[625] Finally, the Bishop does pose a plausible candidate. His see, Ráith Maige Aenaig, if it is correctly identified as Raymoghy,[626] is only 35 kilometres north of Raphoe and 50 kilometres west of Derry, both of which are associated with the Columban federation, and 20 kilometres southwest of Ailech, the royal fortress of the Cenél nEógain,[627] placing it firmly within the territory of the Northern Uí Néill. This bishop may have been within the orbit of Iona, and so we might imagine that any decrees he produced may have been confused, or combined, with those of his namesake of Iona. If, however, we consider the fact that this site produced only one other figure of record,[628] marking its relative inconsequence in comparison to its Columban neighbours, it would seem that this Adomnán was unlikely to have had the ecclesiastical clout to issue a series of canons that would have been accepted by the Columban community. Adomnán the Abbot remains, yet we cannot be certain that these

[621] O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán: a man of many parts', pp. 45-46.
[622] Ó Néill and Dumville have noted that *Can. Ad.*, §1 suggests an insular setting, but that this cannot be tied directly to Iona, and that the voice of the text switches from the third plural (which would include the author) to third-person references to an unnamed authority; Ó Néill and Dumville, *Cáin Adomnáin and Canones Adomnani*, pp. xviii-xix and p. xxi. The canons which are explicitly in the third person are *Can. Ad.*, §1, §10, and §12, though the canons §§2-9, §11, and §13-14 clearly form a logical whole with those three, as they are all concerned with food hygiene. §15 breaks from this, discussing acceptability of stolen cattle as alms. §16 begins a series of four canons which refer to an authority figure: §§16-17 and §§19-20. §18 is interpreted as referring to the authority, but such may not necessarily be the case; see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 254, n. 7. Here Bieler follows the translation offered in McNeil and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 134. Even so, the final four canons, like the first fourteen, form a consistent whole, as they too discuss issues concerning the contamination of food. Canon §16 describes the procedure of what to do if man's wife renounces him and takes another man as her husband.
[623] AU 731.8.
[624] *HE*, IV 24.
[625] AU 836.9.
[626] On the identification of Raymoghy, see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 478.
[627] Byrne, *Kings*, p. 94.
[628] That is Ciarán, abbot of Ráith Maige Aenaig and of Tech Mo Fhinniu; see AU 784.2.

canons were by his hand, or simply inspired by him. In this dim confusion, Cú Chuimne may cast some light: Recension B of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* refers to one of these canons, ascribing it to Adomnán of Iona – who better than 'the Hound of Memory', a monk of Iona and co-author of the *Hibernensis*, to know the source of these canons?[629]

Of the text's twenty canons, only two are not concerned with matters of hygiene or the contamination of food or water, and it is to these two aberrations that we shall pay particular attention. The first warns 'Christians' against accepting, in trade or as gifts, cattle seized in a raid,[630] while the second discusses what is to be done with a wife who has abandoned her husband for another man.[631] Such decrees must have been born of practical, 'real-world' necessity. The former may offer us some insight into a certain aspects, or limitations of penitential acts, and the latter, into the Church's perception of marriage.

This warning against accepting stolen property is practical advice for a monastic establishment which wishes to avoid making itself a target for attack, either through legal proceedings, besmirching the honour of the foundation and its patron saint, or even by violence that could result in the injury or death of its inhabitants. If the property was taken in the form of trade, and if it was successfully repossessed by the rightful owner, the monastery in question would have suffered a two-fold loss: the stolen property and whatever items were bartered for it.[632] The issue of receiving stolen goods as alms would have been even more worrisome to the author; such gifts may have been considered a penitential contribution

[629] The latest cited authority in Recension A of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* is the *Iudicia Theodori*, and in Recension B, the *Canones Adomnani*; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: commemorative studies on his life and influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 144-146. The two scribes associated with the compilation of the *Hibernensis* were Ruben, *scriba* of Dar-Inis, and Cú Chuimne, *sapiens* of Iona; see, Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995; reprinted, 2003), pp. 29-31; and AU 725.4 and 747.5. Considering the inclusion of the *Canones Adomnani*, and the fact that one of the scribes was a monk of Iona, Recension B must have been completed before 747, and, presumably, Recension A before 725.

[630] *Can. Ad.*, §15. It should be noted that this reference to 'Christians' is probably not applicable to the laity as the canon describes the recipients of the goods as *miles Christi*, which is to say, monks.

[631] *Ibid.*, §16. It is interesting to note that here Iona stands at odds with the 'Penitential of Theodore', which suggests that, if his wife leaves him or is taken into captivity, a man can remarry after a fixed number of years, but there appears to be some confusion as to whether or not he should receive the first wife back if she is freed and if she too can remarry; Paul Willem Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929), U ii XII §§20-25. The relative austerity of Iona may be explained if monastic tenants are in question, which appears to be the case, as such people were under the direct control of an ecclesiastic establishment and subject to its regulations, while the general laity had a greater degree of freedom. Furthermore, while divorce was allowed under early Irish law, a woman who absconded from her husband lost all of her rights and could not seek the protection of anyone of any rank; Kelly, *Law*, p. 74. In this light, the *Canones Adomnani* are reinforcing secular law to a certain degree, stating what is required of the husband in such a situation.

[632] Under native law, the sale of stolen goods was invalid. The party who received the goods is only considered guilty if they were aware of the illegal condition of the property. A member of the noble class could retake their property immediately, while the lower orders had to make a formal complaint, see Kelly, *Law*, p. 148.

(perhaps for the sin of the theft itself!) provided by the offender, an exchange of terrestrial material for spiritual profit.[633] According to the text, a donation of this kind was rendered null by the tears of the victim.[634] It may have been the case that stolen property was given as alms sufficiently frequently by the laity as to require this legislation on the matter, perhaps demonstrating a misguided belief that the remission of sin could be bought, so to speak, through donations to the Church, rather than the understanding that alms were a symbol of the personal sacrifice indicative of true repentance. This may indicate that the laity were participating in acts of penance, but had not yet fully come to grasp the spiritual significance of the act.

If a woman leaves her husband and is married to a second or third man, the first husband may not take the hand of another while his wife still lives. Considering the ecclesiastical focus of the text, it may have been that, though this judgement may have been applied to the wider laity, this regulation is specifically concerned with the *manaig*, a particular class of laity who were tenants of monastic establishments and were, as such, entitled to pastoral care.[635] The woman had become, in the eyes of the Church, a harlot by abandoning her legitimate husband and marrying another.[636] The *Cáin Adomnáin* may also be alluding to such a couple when it refers to 'law-abiding laymen with their legitimate spouses' as being under the protection of the Church.[637] The Penitential of Finnian explicitly states that a wife must not leave her husband, but if she does, both parties must remain unmarried, placing extra emphasis on the demand for the man to remain celibate until his wife either returns or dies,[638] which would imply that the *Canones Adomnani* is reiterating an established

[633] Recall that Cummian explicitly states that alms remit sin; see above, p. 69, n. 296.
[634] *Can. Ad.*, §15.
[635] Colmán Etchingham, 'The Early Irish Church: some observations on pastoral cares and dues', *Éiru*, 42 (1991), p. 105.
[636] Under native law, a woman could divorce her husband under certain conditions, which would require the division of their shared property, and remarry, for which she would receive a portion of the *coibche*, or bride-price; see Kelly, *Law*, pp. 70-75.
[637] Adomnán, *Cáin Adomnáin*, §34. It is interesting to note that the text specifically refers to the *cétmunteraib* of the *láichib*, which is to say, the first/chief wife of the layman, a hint that Adomnán (or whichever authority created the decree), as a realist, accepted that polygamy and concubinage may still have been practiced among the laity. If, however, we consider the fact that the layman in the *Cáin* is seen to be under the protection of the Church, the term may be being used here to refer to the legally recognised wife of the layman.
[638] *Pen. Vinn.*, §§(S) 42-45. If either party fornicates during the separation the penalty is one year's penance on an allowance of bread and water. The Penitential of Cummian briefly states that a wife who has deserted, and then returns to, her husband must do one year of penance, and, equally, the man must undertake the same penance if he has taken another wife; *Paen. Cumm.*, §II 29. The biblical support for this is 1 Cor. 7:10-11, which demands that a wife not leave her husband, but, if she does, both must remain celibate until she is reconciled. We also find reference to the insolubility of marriage in *VC*, II 41, and in *VB I*, §41. In these hagiographical episodes, both saints successfully restore a couple to a state of happy matrimony.

tradition. The special nature of these *manaig* will be discussed in greater detail later in Chapter 7.

4.5 Forging a new *status quo*

All the Churches of the Irish depended on the support of kings and sought to gain their favour, in return for which they provided divine sanction and spiritual succour; aspects of this transaction, in the hagiographical context of the Patrician and Brigitine traditions, were discussed in the previous chapter. Iona was no different in this appeal to secular authorities. Adomnán did not create this complex relationship between kings, warriors, bloodshed, penance, and the *familia Columbae* by himself, but his abbacy may be seen as the apex of a long process begun by Columba. Taking his *Vita Columbae* and *Cáin* together as an expression of a systematic process of thought, rather than individual works, it does appear that Adomnán attempted to re-negotiate the terms of this agreement, and perhaps fundamentally change the relationship between Church and Kingdom.

In his *Vita*, Columba is shown to be a frequent companion of kings. On arriving in Britain, he appears to have made his way to the court of the king of Dál Riada (Conall mac Comgaill),[639] whose death notice in the Annals of Ulster records that he granted Iona to Columba for the founding of his monastery.[640] Such relationships are commonplace between kings and churchmen, as demonstrated by the *Vitae* of Brigit and Patrick, but Columba goes farther. It would appear that the saint performed the earliest anointing of king outside of Visigothic Spain, as he is said, by Adomnán, to have ordained Áedán mac Gabráin as king of Dál Riada, even going so far as to bless his third son as his successor.[641] Whether or not this is indicative of a ritual of anointing or a more general blessing,[642] it is suggestive of a special relationship between Iona and Cenél nGabráin. Indeed, one of the earliest references to Columba in the annals is an entry which states that a force led by his cousin Ainmire, king of the Cenél Conaill, gained victory with the aid of the saint's prayers over Diarmait mac

[639] *VC*, I 7.
[640] AU 574.2.
[641] *VC*, III 5 & I 9.
[642] Michael J. Enright, *Prophecy and Kingship in Adomnán's 'Life of Saint Columba'* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 57-61, and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 360-361.

Cerball, king of Tara, at the battle of Cúl Dreimne in 561.[643] Whether or not such actions were behind the excommunication of Columba by a synod at Teiltiu prior to his departure from Ireland in 563, a synod that Adomnán informs us was found to have acted wrongly,[644] this reference to the spiritual support of one army over another is carried through in the depiction of the saint in his *Vita*. If Columba was indeed excommunicated for praying for the victory of his patrons, it did not deter him one iota from doing so again; he is shown, for example, as suddenly summoning his monks to pray for the victory of Áedán mac Gabráin in battle against barbarians.[645] The *Amra Colum Cille*, a poetic eulogy to the saint, implies that it was composed under the patronage of Áed, the son of the Ainmire whom Columba had supported at Cúl Dreimne.[646] Columba is said to have met with Áed mac Ainmirech, overlord of the Northern Uí Néill, and Áedán mac Gabráin at Druim Cett; at this meeting Columba blessed Áed's son and prophesied that he would succeed to the kingship of the Uí Néill.[647] Though for all intents and purposes a holy and humble abbot, Columba was himself of royal blood and often found himself in the company of kings, some whom he supposedly anointed, some whose sons he blessed, and some for whose victory in battle he prayed. Even in death, it was said that he could provide assistance to a righteous king. A vision of Columba reassures Oswald that he will be victorious at Heavenfield against Cadwallon.[648] While we may doubt Columba's power of prophecy and ability to appear in dreams, it is clear that, in life, he lent his spiritual support to kings he deemed worthy, and, in death, his memory was used by his hagiographer to reinforce the idea that, through supporting Iona, contemporary rulers too could gain the ethereal and effective patronage of Columba. From its foundation, Iona and its abbots were deeply entrenched in the politics of Ireland and northern Britain, providing relationships which could be cultivated and exploited; there is no better demonstration of this than the guarantor list of the *Cáin Adomnáin*.

Such a relationship, of a saint tacitly supporting violent deeds, is given a biblical underpinning by Adomnán, placing the *Life* of Columba in stark contrast to aspects of the Brigitine and Patrician traditions, where kings and warriors need merely submit to the saint to

[643] See n. 603 above.
[644] *VC*, III 3.
[645] *Ibid*., I 8. The bell of Iona is rung only four times in the *Vita*: *ibid*., I 8, II 42, III 13 and III 23. The first three are situations where the monks of Iona are brusquely called to pray for the protection of an individual or individuals, while the last is a reference to a standard indication of church service. It must be recognised that it may have been acceptable to support a Christian king fighting against pagans (the *barbari* of the text), but not one Christian fighting against another, as at Cúl Dreimne.
[646] Clancy and Márkus, *Iona: the Earliest Poetry*, p. 98.
[647] *VC*, I 10.
[648] *VC*, I 1.

gain their favour. Enright's insight into Adomnán's rather different style of hagiography reveals that the ninth abbot hoped to shape the memory of Columba to be no mere saint, but an Old Testament prophet of kings along the lines of Elijah, Elisha, and Samuel.[649] Columba's divine aid secures victory for, as noted above, Áedán mac Gabráin and Oswald, and warriors who sing songs in praise of him are saved from slaughter, depictions of a client-lord relationship which is not incompatible with the attitudes found in elements of, for example, the Brigitine traditions. In Adomnán's hands, however, the figure of Columba appears to be more concerned with inappropriate acts of violence. The saint foresees that Áed Dub will ultimately die a triple death for his killing of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, the king of all Ireland as ordained by God, according to Adomnán. Columba also personally commands the death, via the intervention of God, of a persecutor of innocents. Kings and warriors could expect the protection of a saint just so long as they submitted to them, becoming spiritual clients to this prophet-saint, but Adomnán's Columba required more of his clients; he demanded that they be just. The kings of the Patrician texts were required to do little more than convert to the new faith and submit to Patrick to secure the enduring success of their dynasties. In parts of the Brigitine traditions, kings and warriors too simply submitted to the saint, and yet their habits changed little once they were girded with her protection in their martial endeavours. Adomnán's Columba begins on this same track, but, more than any of the hagiographies examined, it is made explicit that, though the protection of Columba could be sought by anyone, not only would those who violated such protection be punished, but those who did not fulfil the saint's requirements would find his favour revoked.

When viewed alongside the *Cáin*, Adomnán's depiction of Columba takes on even greater force and nuance. The various penitential texts noted previously only prescribe penance for acts of violence perpetrated by an individual, that is, bloodshed which is outside the limits of social norms, committed by one who believes that they have broken some moral code and must make spiritual compensation for it. While various nuances based on the intention to kill developed and were recognised by these Penitentials, the understanding that killing in combat was a different and special circumstance was not, as yet, accounted for in the Irish system. As shall be discussed in the following chapter, such an innovation did eventually find its way into the handbooks of penance, but Adomnán arrived at his own unique solution. The *Cáin Adomnáin* demonstrates that Adomnán directly engaged with secular figures to enforce his vision of society and the place of the Church, kings, and

[649] Enright, *Prophecy and Kingship*, pp. 10-13 and pp. 46-47.

violence within it. The punishment imposed on warriors who transgress the law and kill an innocent includes terms of penance, fixed sums of compensation, and more fatal consequences. The scope of the *Cáin* includes those who committed the acts inadvertently or in ignorance, indicating that intent was key in understanding the culpability of the offender, just as it was in the system outlined in the Penitentials. Adomnán appears to have hoped to impose defined limits on warfare and raiding, and their consequences, enshrining in law the difference between what, in the modern day, might be called legitimate military targets from civilian non-combatants.

The *Cáin* was reinforced by the miracles depicted in the *Vita*, where good kings were rewarded and the persecutors of innocents punished. A just king meted out the law fairly and with appropriate obedience to the Church (and, more specifically, to Iona), and he was rewarded with a prosperous reign, the security of his line, and victory over his enemies. Adomnán's law code was an attempt to renegotiate the relationship between the Church and secular authorities to conform with an Old Testament vision of a Godly kingdom, where kings had to earn the approval of the Church by adhering to a code of practice, beginning with a system that regulated the manner in which they waged war. Adomnán, it would appear, hoped to portray Iona as holding a unique position in society: as heirs to Columba, it alone could designate which kings were just and worthy of God's favour, and while other Churches might also promulgate *cáin*-laws, only Iona had the influence to have its law underwritten by so many kings and ecclesiastics from across Ireland and Britain.

The fact that so many senior members of the Irish Church signed the *Cáin* may be indicative of their own self-interest in securing the protection of the clergy from bloodshed, but it must be noted that they were also surrendering a certain amount of prestige, and possibly material wealth, to Iona for the sake of this security. The benefit may have far outweighed the cost, not only in the preservation of the physical integrity of churches and their inhabitants, but spiritually in bringing the secular world closer to the ecclesiastical. That was not all the Irish Church sacrificed: if kings were to surrender their right to kill whom they pleased, Adomnán had to offer them a reason to sign. The signatories perhaps gained an element of prestige by underwriting a law associated with Iona, or perhaps they hoped to earn some degree of divine favour. Or perhaps it was a much more practical matter: by explicitly delineating who could not be killed it was implicitly implied who could be. These kings had subscribed to a law that outlined the manner in which they could engage in violence with the

consent of the Church, and under which their warriors could kill with savage intent so long as they did not harm an innocent.

From Adomnán's careful construction of the *Vita Columbae* and the *Cáin* we may deduce that he believed that bloodshed was, though unavoidable, subject to the law, whether religious or secular in origin. Violence sanctioned by the appropriate authority was permissible when exercised by king who had submitted to the spiritual lordship of Columba. Columba's protection extended to his clients, secular and ecclesiastical, and so any violent deeds committed by those who submitted to him could be tolerated, even sanctioned, so long as they maintained their moral standards (recall Columba's retraction of support for the kingship of Áed Sláine after he killed a member of his own kin). Any violence against God's chosen king, or his favoured saint and his clients, was objectionable, and could result in the death of the offender. This notion is reinforced by the *Cáin*, in which Adomnán extends the protection of the *familia Columbae* over the innocent, imposing considerable terms of penitential punishment and fines on the offenders and their families, and, under certain circumstances, even execution.

It their application of retribution for bloodshed, the *Cáin* and the *Vita* differ in one vital respect: it is through God's wrath that transgressors of Columba's protection are punished (and not always immediately), a spiritual justice that stands in contrast to the realistic, and perhaps more immediate, terrestrial law of Adomnán. Columba's protection is extended to any who seek it, warrior or *innocens*, but it is only this latter group which are defended by the authority of Adomnán. This subtle difference – that while warriors may pray for divine support as mediated by the first abbot of Iona, the ninth was creating a practical law to be applied in a secular context – may betray an important ambiguity in the *Cáin*: the killing of adult, non-*innocens* men by similar men is nowhere condemned, nor even commented upon. Are we to understand this as an implicit disapproval of such killing, that all warriors are outside the remit of the Church, and are unforgivable? Or was it the case that Adomnán was content to let well-established secular law deal with such cases, that he was, in a sense, closing a perceived legal loophole? The former scenario appears unlikely when the *Cáin* is taken in context with the *Vita*, illustrating Adomnán's tacit approval, or, more likely, grudging acceptance, of bloodshed under certain circumstances. The fact that there is both a penitential and financial aspect to the remittance for the killing of an *innocens*, a spiritual super-levy in addition to the standard fine, may lead us to conclude that all other forms of killing were exclusively secular, and unforgivable. On the other hand, it may have been

understood that, not unlike secular law, the penitential texts already accounted for certain forms of killing, which may be indicated by Columba's treatment of Librán. Bloodshed was forgivable, even permissible under specific circumstances, but its atonement could be arduous. Even so, Adomnán's works demonstrate that the penitential remission of sin was available to laymen, warriors, bishops, and monks alike.

Though it may be a consequence of the fortuitous survival of his literary efforts, it would appear that Adomnán of Iona was uniquely concerned with the plight of innocents, who, in his mind, were women of all ages, boys who had not yet reached adulthood, and the clergy. Through Adomnán's works, the attitude of one individual towards violence and bloodshed can be gleaned, acts that he directly linked to often extreme penitential repercussions. If the *Canones Adomnani* were indeed written by Adomnán or under his authority, we are presented with evidence which hints at a lack of understanding by the laity as to the nature of alms and to permanence of the marriage vow. Confession, weeping, and alms are all noted as part of the penitential process, and penance could be undertaken by ecclesiast and layman alike. Killers, as symbolised by Librán and the warriors of the *Cáin*, could atone for their sins over a fixed period of time and then return to their lay lifestyle. While one might hesitate to presume that Adomnán's beliefs reveal widespread attitudes among the Irish, it must also be remembered that he was not simply one man, a solitary monk scratching out his thoughts on parchment by dim candlelight, but the leader of one of the most influential monastic federations in the British Isles, a member of one of the most powerful families in Ireland, a highly trained scholar, and an astonishingly successful diplomat: at the very least, his ideas and beliefs would have held tremendous force within the *familia Columbae* and throughout the regions where it was established. This, coupled with the extensive ecclesiastical and royal support indicated by the list of signatories to the *Cáin*, implies that Adomnán's thoughts on matters of penance and bloodshed were held in great esteem, his influence rippling out across the seas from the island of Iona to the shores of Ireland and Britain.

Chapter 5: Theodore of Tarsus and His Impact on Irish Penitential Thought

5.1 Theodore's Penitential

Theodore of Tarsus, having travelled gradually westward from his homeland over the course of his life,[650] arrived in England on 27 May 669 as the new archbishop of Canterbury, a position he would hold until his death at the age of eighty-eight on 19 September 690.[651] He spent the first years of his archiepiscopacy visiting every corner of Britain where the Anglo-Saxons had settled, investing bishops in sees that had fallen vacant, instructing the clergy on the correct Christian customs, and encouraging the use of sacred music.[652] In 673 he called a council of bishops and important churchmen at Hertford to ensure conformity throughout his jurisdiction.[653] Theodore appears to have been particularly concerned with ensuring orthodoxy and uniformity of practice, based firmly on canon law,[654] which may be why he accepted, with some amendment, the Irish penitential system. How better to ensure conformity and regularity in the most delicate matter, and pastoral necessity, of judging the penalties for sins than with a handbook on penance? The nature of the handbook in question is, however, a rather complicated affair: Theodore did not compose this penitential, rather it purports to be a collection of answers offered by the Archbishop to a presbyter named Eoda in reference to a *libellus Scottorum*.[655] How the 'little Irish book' came into Eoda's possession is unknown; was Cummian's Penitential transmitted to Iona (perhaps dispatched along with his letter to Ségéne), and from there to Northumbria, eventually arriving at Canterbury? Or did it arrive in a more direct fashion, carried by one of the many Anglo-Saxon and Irish scholars who travelled between both islands? Whatever the case may have been, Theodore's commentaries on Eoda's book were later gathered together and edited by an anonymous scribe, the *Discipulus Umbrensium*, a collection which became known as the

[650] For an overview of Theodore's life, see Michael Lapidge, 'The career of Archbishop Theodore', in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: commemorative studies on his life and influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1-29.
[651] *HE*, IV 1-2, and V 8.
[652] *Ibid.*, IV 2.
[653] *Ibid.*, IV 5.
[654] Lapidge, 'The career of Archbishop Theodore', pp. 27-28.
[655] This 'little book of the Irish' (which is to say, Cummian's Penitential) is explicitly noted twice in the 'Penitential of Theodore': see U, *prologus* and i, VII 5. For a discussion of the role of the Disciple, see Roy Flechner, 'The making of the Canons of Theodore', *Peritia* 17-18 (2003-2004), pp. 126-130.

'Penitential of Theodore'.[656] To add another layer of confusion to the matter, this was not the only document concerning penitential material ascribed to Theodore that was in circulation; four such texts have been identified, of which the version by the *Discipulus Umbrensium* is the most extensive.[657] The intricacies of the relationships between these texts are not relevant to the present discussion: we need only note that two of these texts appear to have been used in an Irish context: the *Dacheriana* and the work of the Disciple.[658] The former is referenced in Recension A of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, compiled before 725,[659] and the latter is quoted in the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials of the eighth century (both of which will be discussed in greater detail below).[660] The *Dacheriana* appear to precede the discussion of Cummian's Penitential at Canterbury, both of which became part of a collection of texts compiled while the Archbishop was still living.[661] It was this collection that was used by the *Discipulus Umbrensium* to produce his work after the death of Theodore, though seemingly without any direct knowledge of Cummian.[662]

Though the first book of 'The Penitential of Theodore' is ultimately based on Cassian's scheme, mediated through Cummian's Penitential, it contains numerous additions,[663] and the second book bears no relationship to the Irish text. Just as in Cummian, we find the canons which deal with killing and bloodshed in the fourth chapter. The Penitential of Theodore begins its decisions on the killing of men with a decree on slaying another in revenge for a relative: one guilty of this crime must do penance as a murderer for seven or ten years, unless he pays the relatives the value of the slain man, in which case the

[656] See Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: commemorative studies on his life and influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 141-142, and McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 180.
[657] Editions of the four texts – D, G, Co, and U – are to be found in Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis*, pp. 239-334.
[658] The *Dacheriana* and the work of the Disciple are designated the D and U texts in Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis*, pp. 239-254 and pp. 285-334 respectively. As for their use in an Irish context (noting that Charles-Edwards refers to the *Dacheriana* as the *Iudicia Theodori*), see Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', p. 142.
[659] *Ibid*., pp. 141-142.
[660] Theodore is noted extensively in the Bigotian Penitential; indeed the first two penances are ascribed to him: see *Paen. Bi.*, §1.1-2. In the Old-Irish Penitential we find him referenced specifically on three occasions: see OI Pen., I §4, II §21, and III §2.
[661] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', pp. 155-157.
[662] *Ibid*., pp. 157.
[663] While the themes of the first four chapters are identical in both works, from the fifth chapter onwards there is little correlation. For example, Chapters 1-4 in both texts discuss gluttony, fornication, avarice, and anger (though, in Theodore, the first is referred to as *De crapula et ebrietate* and the last is less ambiguously called *De occisione hominum*), but the very next chapter in Cummian is *De tristitia*, where in Theodore we find *De his qui heresim decipiuntur*; compare *Paen. Cumm.*, I-V, and U, i, I-V.

penitential term is halved.[664] The penalty for killing in revenge for the death of a brother is substantially less – three years – though the text notes that 'In another place it is said that he [the killer] should do penance for ten years'.[665] As a confirmation of what is indicated in the first passage, the third states that the penance for homicide is ten or seven years.[666] Immediately following this, it is stated that premeditated killing carries the penalty of seven years' penance for an individual who will not 'relinquish his arms', three of which are without meat and wine.[667] The (curious) implication here appears to be that the offender must only undertake a fixed term of penance if he is not willing to become a monk. Even if it is a monk or a cleric that has been killed, the punishment is the same: the laying aside of arms or seven years' penance.[668] This sinner is judged by a bishop,[669] but one who kills a bishop or presbyter is judged by the king.[670] In this penitential text we are introduced, for the first time, to the notion of the remittance of sin for killing in the service of a lord or in public war: the former is punished by banishment from the church for forty days, and the latter by penance for the same period.[671] This text recognises two types of killing where the offending party has diminished responsibility: killing committed in anger, which requires three years' penance, and accidental killing, for which only one year of penance is required.[672] If an individual is killed by 'a potion or any trick', the offender suffers the same penance as a wilful murderer, though a longer term may be imposed.[673] If the deed is the result of a quarrel, the penalty is a penitential term of ten years.[674]

The 'Penitential of Theodore' presents the reader with a somewhat confusing series of canons concerning killing. A man who kills in revenge (ignoring the reduced penance for the revenge of a sibling for the moment) can undertake the same penitential term as a homicide, that is seven or ten years' penance. In contrast to this, the layman who kills with calculated malice, whether he kills another layman, a cleric, or a monk, is subjected to only seven years of penance, and only he is offered the option of permanently laying aside arms, a caveat

[664] U, i, IV §1.
[665] '...in alio loco X annos penitere dicitur'; *ibid*., IV §2. This *alio loco* appears to be another text in the group of canons associated with Theodore which the Disciple used to build his work: Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis*, G 111.
[666] U, i, IV §3. This decree may be based upon the confused transmission of *Canones Hibernenses*, I §3; see n. 781 below.
[667] '...si non vult aram relinquere peniteat VII annos...'; *ibid*., IV §4.
[668] *Ibid*., IV §5.
[669] *Ibid*.
[670] *Ibid*.
[671] *Ibid*., IV §6.
[672] *Ibid*., IV §7.
[673] '...si per poculum vel per artem aliquam VII annos aut plus...'; *ibid*.
[674] *Ibid*.

which bears the clear imprint of Cummian.[675] In spite of this, Theodore's abandonment of Cummian's singular command for the permanent penance of a premeditated killer is an interesting turn of events; perhaps the Archbishop chose to follow the decisions of a Gallic synod over the teachings of the *libellus Scottorum*.[676] The seven or ten year penance may be a muddled transmission of Finnian, who demanded seven years of penance and ten in exile of a cleric who killed, or of an unlocated Irish synod which decreed that a killer must suffer seven years' penance, though noting that an esteemed cleric demanded ten.[677] It may be the case that some or all of these teachings had filtered through to Canterbury during Theodore's archiepiscopacy at different times, or it may be that he himself included his own decisions on such matters, and that the Disciple gathered together all known teachings and forced order upon them as best he could. One must also consider the possibility that there was understood to be a distinction between the *homicida* and the *laicus alterum occiderit odii meditatione*, perhaps the difference between a brigand who intentionally kills a traveller on the road for their money and a farmer who plots to kill his neighbour to secure better property.

The demand that one who kills in anger or by accident must undertake three or one years of penance respectively is clearly inspired by Cummian.[678] It is in this canon that we are also told that one who kills by a potion or a trick suffers seven or more years of penance, the ambiguity of which may be a result of the garbled transmission of Theodore's teaching on the matter or the suggestion that the confessor can increase the term on his own judgement. Ten years' penance is required of one who kills in a quarrel, which is harsher than that for killing in anger, which might be considered a similar sin. Perhaps here again there is a confusion in the reporting of Theodore's position on the issue, but it may have also been understood that killing in a quarrel was not equivalent to killing in anger if it had been the result of an on-going argument, such that death was not the unfortunate outcome of a drunken brawl but as the intentional and violent resolution of a land dispute.

---

[675] Compare U, i, IV §5 and *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §5.

[676] Theodore stayed in the company of Agilbert, bishop of Paris, during the winter of 668/669, so it is not unreasonable to suggest that he was probably aware of the canons of the Council of Clichy; see *HE*, IV 1. The Council of Clichy decreed that one who had killed voluntarily, once they had completed their penance, could return to communion, which clearly implies that the penalty for premeditated killing was limited in its term, in contrast to Cummian, though not whether the offender was free to return to the lay lifestyle: 'Si quis homicidium sponte commiserit et non uiolenter resistens, sed uim faciens interfecerit cum isto penitus non communicandum, sic tamen ut, si paenitentiam egerit, in exitum ei communionis uiaticum non negetur', *Concilium Clippiacense*, §11. Agilbert, a Gaul by birth, had studied the Scriptures in Ireland, became Bishop of the West Saxons, and participated in the Synod of Whitby before his return to his homeland, placing him in a uniquely well-informed position to advise Theodore of Anglo-Saxon and Irish practices; *HE*, III 7 and 25.

[677] *Pen. Vinn*. §23, and *Canones Hibernenses*, I §§2-3.

[678] Compare U, i, IV §7 and *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §§7-8.

If a man has committed many evil deeds, *id est homicidium, adulterium... et furtum*, he must enter a monastery and do penance until death.[679] Such a decree may have been an exercise in efficiency: it is easy to imagine that it was expected that he who was guilty of numerous accounts of the gravest sins would spend the rest of his life living in atonement, or that his inability to restrain himself required strict observation and permanent correction. This penance also serves to underline the fact that one who had not committed many evil deeds, but perhaps only one, was not expected to observe a permanent state of penitence for their sins.

The penitential attributed to Theodore, though in many respects inspired by Cummian's Penitential, clearly diverges from its Irish exemplar, presenting a confessor with a range of new forms of killing to discern the appropriate penance for a killer. Agreeing with its predecessor only on the penalty for killing in anger without premeditation and accidental murder, this text, for the first time in the handbooks of spiritual medicine, seeks to impose penance on revenge killings, and, most strikingly, killing at the command of a lord or in public conflict is recognised as a separate sin, one which is washed away in a mere forty days. Where before sins were divided along lines of intent, Theodore introduced nuances based on the social obligations of the offender: a warrior had to kill for his lord in war, and one family member may have been compelled to seek revenge for another. This is a radical shift in the understanding of the sin of killing, an understanding which opens up a new avenue of forgiveness to any man who has killed another in war. Killing in revenge for a family member is equivalent to voluntary homicide, in terms of the penance served, but it may have been separated out to underline that the sin itself was of a different quality. Indeed, the fact that killing in revenge for a sibling carries a reduced penalty may be a recognition of an overwhelming social obligation or the consequences of grief. Perhaps Theodore had misunderstood the underpinning nature of the Penitentials concerning killing, that intentionality was the key factor, or perhaps he saw his additions as the logical progression of the system: if killing could be divided between intentional and non-intentional forms, and the latter again separated on grounds of anger and accident, then why not partition the former in terms of social acceptability and obligation? This is indicative of the Church inserting itself into the regulation of social affairs, but also of accommodating the needs of the laity: a successful warrior may have believed that he fought with God at his shoulder, that the commands of his king carried the support of the Church, so how could he be condemned as a

[679] U, i, VII §1.

murderer? His understanding of his role in society placed him outside the limits of penance, imperilling his soul. Just as the hagiographers of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick sought to define the relationship between the warrior and the Church, with Adomnán going so far as to create a law-code which demanded punishment for the killing of non-combatants in open conflict, so too did Theodore; where one offered a solution through submitting to the lordship of a saint and their personal protection, the other resolved the issue by integrating such offenders into the penitential system.

5.2 The Bigotian Penitential

The Penitential ascribed to Theodore, demonstrative of an active discourse of Irish ecclesiastical material in an Anglo-Saxon context, appears to have been rapidly disseminated and received back into Ireland, presumably via the Irish scholars he gathered around him at Canterbury,[680] if not by the large number of clerics who travelled from Britain to Ireland.[681] One can easily imagine how the quick reception of works ascribed to Theodore may have been due to his impeccable credentials as a papal officer who was determined to inspire conformity in the wake of an era of controversy and dissent within the Anglo-Saxon and Irish Churches in Britain. Aspects of his penitential thought, specifically concerning bloodshed, became key elements to two further Irish Penitentials and authoritative teachings in the Irish collection of canon law.

The penitential known as the 'Bigotian' is largely based upon the Penitential of Cummian and is closely related to the Old-Irish Penitential,[682] with some additional material drawn from the 'Penitential of Theodore'. It has been posited that the Bigotian, dated to the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century,[683] is a product of Irish influence on the continent,[684] though recent arguments have suggested that it was written in Ireland.[685]

[680] D. L. T. Bethell, 'The Originality of the Early Irish Church', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 111 (1981), p. 46.
[681] *HE*, III §27.
[682] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 10, and Kenney, *Sources*, p. 241.
[683] McNeil and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 148.
[684] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 10; Kenney, *Sources*, p. 241; and David N. Dumville, 'Ireland, Brittany, and England: transmission and use of the *Collectio canonum hibernensis*', in Catherine Laurent and Helen Davis (eds.), *Irland et Bretagne: vingt siecles d'histoire: actes du colloque de Rennes* (Rennes, 1994), p. 88.

Indeed, using Bieler's own evidence, one might arrive at the conclusion that the text is most likely Irish in origin: considering that it draws heavily from Cummian, with reference to Theodore (whose attributed works were, as noted above, apparently readily available in Ireland),[686] that it is the basis for the Old-Irish Penitential, and that it 'is far less contaminated with English or continental matter than are the 'mixed' penitentials of eighth- and ninth-century France',[687] Ireland would indeed appear to be the more likely source for the origin of this text.

In its lengthy introduction, the writer of the Bigotian makes specific reference to the role of the confessor, and of how there is merit in converting a sinner from error.[688] It also contains a list of the ways that sins may be remitted, which is shorter and in a different order from Cummian: baptism, martyrdom, alms, forgiveness, charity, penance, and converting a sinner from his ways.[689] 'Penance' would appear to fold several of Cummian's divisions into one term (such as confession and the shedding of tears), while the curious omission of the intercession of the saints may imply that the compiler of the Bigotian deems human agency and the grace of God to be the only avenues towards the remission of sin. As with Cummian's Penitential, this work is organised according to Cassian's eight vices.

The first penance concerning the sin of killing is that for parricide: the offender must suffer fourteen years on bread and water.[690] Following the example of Theodore, killing another in revenge for a friend requires seven or ten years penance, unless the murderer is

---

[685] Charles-Edwards dismisses the evidence offered by Bieler in no short order; see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws', in John Blair and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 75, n. 64. Etchingham appears to agree with locating the text in Ireland; see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 61.

[686] Aldhelm recorded that Theodore was 'hemmed in by a mass of Irish students', and that students from Britain travelled to Ireland 'by the fleetload' to study; 'Letter V: to Heahfrith', in Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 163. Either of these student bodies could have easily, and with relative alacrity, transmitted Theodore's teachings back to Ireland.

[687] Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 10.

[688] *Paen. Bi.*, *Prologus* §29, referring to James 5:20.

[689] Compare *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus* §§2-13, and *Paen. Bi.*, *Prologus* §§29-31. This new list may be indicative of the influence of Origen, whose seven remedies for sin were: baptism, martyrdom, the giving of alms, pardoning others, amending the lives of others, the abundance of love, and doing penance; see Meens, 'Remedies for sin', pp. 399-400.

[690] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.1. The source of this stipulation appears to be *Canones Hibernenses* I §1, which allows for the term of penance to be halved in the event that it was committed in ignorance, a caveat omitted from the Bigotian. By placing parricide at the head of this list of sins, it would appear that this crime of killing a close relative was of particular importance; perhaps the compiler of the Bigotian was responding to increasing violence within Irish dynastic families. One need only consider the complex relationships between the kings of the southern Uí Néill: Áed Sláine, king of Brega, killed his nephew Suibne, king of Mide, and was in turn killed in revenge by Suibne's son, Conall Guthbinn, several years later, with Conall himself ultimately being killed by a son of Áed, Diarmait, a year after he had killed two other sons of Áed; see AU 600.1, 604.2, 634.1 635.1.

willing to pay the family of the deceased, in which case the penitential term is halved.[691] In the case of revenge for a brother, only three years of penance is demanded.[692] The murderer of a cleric or monk must either renounce arms and serve God, or do penance for seven years.[693] For the killing of a bishop or a priest, the punishment is judged by the king.[694] For killing in public war the penance is forty days.[695] The killing of another through anger or in a quarrel, which is specifically noted in the text as being *non ex meditatione odii*, requires three years of penance,[696] and the penalty for causing the accidental death of another is one year.[697] Premeditated murder, after taking vows of perfection, demands the punishment of perpetual exile.[698]

Maintaining the precepts of the *Ambrosianum* and Cummian, the Bigotian Penitential requires that one who injures or maims another work in their place until they are well, cover their medical expenses, and do penance for half a year; if they cannot afford to do so, one year of penance is imposed.[699] During this penance, a fast of bread and water is enforced during the forty-day periods.[700] If a cleric commits this offence, he must do penance for a year and a half.[701]

The sins of killing receive peculiar amendment in Bigotian when compared to its predecessors. The religious are uniquely protected; no reference is made to the general penance for homicide, only for killing a monk or a cleric, which is punished by a seven year term similar to that imposed by Theodore on lay murder. The perpetual exile and laying aside of arms required by Cummian for premeditated murder is applied (minus the demand to relinquish weapons) only to one who has taken orders; what was once a penance for a layman

[691] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.2. Compare with U, i, IV §1. It is interesting to note that in the latter text the offender is equated to a homicide, a point the former omits.
[692] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.2. This decree is also found in the Disciple's work, which also contains the additional note that ten years may also be imposed; U, i, IV §2. The omission of the ten year term may have been an editorial decision of compiler of the Bigotian, or it may be evidence of Theodore's teachings arriving in Ireland in an inconsistent fashion.
[693] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.2. Compare with U, i, IV §5.
[694] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.3. Compare with U, i, IV §5
[695] 'Qui in puplico bello hominem occiderit, xl dies peniteat', *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.4. This is perhaps the most significant borrowing from the 'Penitetnial of Theodore'; U, i, IV §6.
[696] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §3.2. The wording of this penance in the Bigotian more closely follows *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §8 than U, i, IV §7. This indicates that the compiler of the Bigotian was not simply amending or re-writing the 'Penitential of Theodore' for an Irish context, but was actively weaving Cummian's and the Disciple's works together.
[697] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §3.3. This penitential demand resembles *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §8, rather than the brief statement found in U, i, IV §7, adding further evidence to the point raised above in n. 696.
[698] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §3.4.
[699] *Ibid.*, IV §3.1. Compare to *Paen. Amb.*, *De ira*, IV §6, and *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §§9-10.
[700] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §3.1.
[701] *Ibid.*, IV §3.1.

is now exclusively applied to a member of the Church. For the first time, kin-slaying is punished by its own penance, which is double that of premeditated murder. The penance for the killing of another in revenge is carried over from Theodore, though the compiler of the Bigotian simplified the term of punishment for avenging a brother's death. The forty-day penance for killing in public war is also adopted from the 'Penitential of Theodore'. These various factors may suggest that the Bigotian was meant to be used alongside Cummian's or Theodore's Penitentials, clarifying and updating certain matters not covered in its predecessors; on the other hand, it may indeed have been a product of an institution which considered all lay forms of premeditated killing to be encompassed by parricide or revenge, being more concerned for the sins of those who had taken vows and for the protection of the clergy and monks. The adoption of the penance for killing in conflict clearly demonstrates a recognition of lay killing, and so the confessor who held this handbook must have been expected to deal with lay forms of bloodshed, making the omission of premeditated murder by a layman all the more curious. It may be that the Bigotian is a penitential for an ecclesiastical centre which did not administer to the laity at large, but only to its own lay tenants who may have been under some vow, but who were still expected to defend the site by force of arms. However, considering that the compiler of this penitential had access to Cummian's and Theodore's works, it seems more plausible to suggest that the Bigotian was part of a library of penitential teachings which could be examined together by a confessor, and that perhaps this penitential was created to bring Theodore into the Irish system and resolve any disagreements between it and Cummian. Whatever the case may have been, this omission of lay homicide is rectified in the closely related Old-Irish Penitential.

5.3 Penance in the Vernacular

Though no firm date is agreed upon for the Old-Irish Penitential,[702] it has been argued that, based on certain linguistic features, it was produced no later than the end of the eighth century.[703] As Cummian and Theodore are explicitly referred to in the text,[704] it cannot be

[702] For the text, see E. J. Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', *Éiru* 7 (1914) pp. 138-191; the translation consulted was 'The Old-Irish Penitential', Binchy (ed. and trans), in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 258-277. Binchy's work offers a more complete translation as it includes Gwynn's own corrigenda and other material not found in the former; see Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Penitential', p. 258.
[703] Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Penitential', p. 258.

from earlier than the late seventh century, and it must follow the Bigotian Penitential, from which it borrows. The Old-Irish Penitential is associated with the monastery of Tallaght,[705] the leading establishment of the religious movement known as the *céli Dé*,[706] which, if correct, would place the compilation of the text in the latter half of the eighth century. The references to Cummian and Theodore offer a useful insight into the construction of this text. Of the three references to Theodore, for example, two appear to be drawn from the Bigotian, while the third is from a separate work.[707] Furthermore, one of the four references to Cummian cannot be found in either the Bigotian or Cummian's Penitential,[708] which would suggest either a mistaken ascription or lost source of penitential teachings by Cummian. Of the other three instances, the Bigotian records a different term of penance when compared against Cummian, differences which are carried over into the Old-Irish Penitential, except in one case where both terms are offered.[709] This, along with the fact that the Bigotian does not overtly refer to Cummian in any of these examples, while the Old-Irish Penitential does, illustrates that the author of the Old-Irish Penitential was not simply creating an Irish translation of the Bigotian, but that he had Cummian's work before him, and was adding material to the framework provided by the Bigotian.[710] Cummian's Penitential, it would seem, remained the foundational text of Irish penitential practice; the fact that it was (plausibly) held in the libraries of Tallaght and Canterbury would suggest that it was quite widely disseminated and remained relevant up to the eighth century.

Though it follows the well-established system of Cassian's eight vices, the surviving manuscripts cut off part way through the seventh vice, and the eighth is omitted altogether,

---

[704] Theodore and Cummian are mentioned together in OI Pen., II §21 and III §2, with Cummian alone cited as an authority in OI Pen., III §12 and §15, and Theodore alone in OI Pen., I §4.
[705] Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Penitential', p. 47.
[706] The *céli Dé* and their association with this text will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
[707] Compare OI Pen., I §4 and III §2 with *Paen. Bi.*, I §5.8, and II §3.1. The reference to Theodore found in OI Pen., II §21 concerns incest with a sister or mother, which carries a penance of fourteen years. For these crimes the Bigotian requires seven or fifteen years; *Paen. Bi.*, II §3.1. When we examine the relevant penances in the four penitential texts attributed to Theodore we find that twelve, fourteen or fifteen years is imposed: D, §64 (fourteen years penance for fornication with one's sister); G, §§89-90 (fifteen for a sister and twelve for a mother); Co, §§153-154 (twelve for both); and, U, i, II §§16-17 (fifteen for both). It would appear then that D (the *Dacheriana*), and not U (the 'Penitential of Theodore') as one might expect, is the source of this penance.
[708] OI Pen., III §15.
[709] Compare *Paen. Cumm.*, II §7, III §1-2, and III §8 to OI Pen., II §21, III §2, and III §12, and *Paen. Bi.*, II §3.1, III §1.3, and III §3.4. In each case the Bigotian either changes (or miscopies?) Cummian's penances for incest (four years instead of three), theft committed by a boy (forty or twenty days instead of forty or thirty days), and swearing a false oath (seven years instead of four). The Old-Irish Penitential follows the Bigotian in each case except the last, where it states that Cummian advised seven *or* four years of penance.
[710] It should be noted that Columba is also cited in one instance: OI Pen., III §12. This may be indicative of a lost penitential of Iona, perhaps based on the Penitential of Finnian, or of a specific ruling attributed to Columba.

suggesting that their exemplar was also incomplete.[711] As it is the only penitential written in Old Irish,[712] one might immediately wonder why there was a shift from Latin to the vernacular; its sister-text, the Old-Irish Table of Commutations,[713] may hold the answer. This latter text offers three different commutations for sins committed by 'one who cannot read';[714] if the implication of this decree is the lack of a Latin education rather than outright illiteracy, whether in reference to members of a monastic community or the laity they served, it may have been a point of practicality to begin providing functional texts, such as this Penitential, in the primary language of the user. *The Monastery of Tallaght* may also offer an interesting clue as to why this Penitential was written in Old Irish: it was imperative, according to Máel Ruain, the founder of Tallaght, that a confessor was to extract a full confession from a sinner, going so far as to interrupt meal-times by 'reading out the Rule and the Penitential'.[715] While this may be referring to a monastic situation, it does point to a need for functionality in such texts: would a confessor refuse to hear the confession of a layman who did not speak Latin? It must have been the case that (lay) confession was undertaken in the vernacular, after which the confessor privately consulted his Latin handbook, and then informed the sinner of his penance in his preferred language. If penance was becoming increasingly available to the laity, perhaps the need for confessors out-paced the production of priests fluent in Latin, or that pastoral necessity trumped erudition. Indeed, reading a Latin text out loud for the purposes of correction may not have been successful if Latin was the

[711] Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Penitential', pp. 258-259. It is interesting to note that the chapters of the Old-Irish Penitential to not exactly agree with the Penitential of Cummian or the Bigotian. Allowing for the loss of *De Superbia*, the Old-Irish Penitential omits *De Accidia* (Languor), seemingly replacing it with the sin of *Inuidia* (Envy), which consists of excerpts from the Bigotian's and Cummian's *De Superbia* (Pride), and inserting it between *Auaritia* (Avarice) and *Ira* (Anger). When the three texts are compared, it is clear that the compiler of the Old-Irish Penitential must have had a copy of Cummian before him as several of the borrowed passages are not found in the Bigotian; compare OI Pen., IV §2, §4, §5, and §7, *Paen. Cumm.*, VIII §6-10, and §14-16, and *Paen. Bi.*, VIII §2.1-2, and §5.

	Cummian	Bigotian	Old-Irish
I	*De Gula*	*De Gula*	*Gula*
II	*De Fornicatione*	*De Fornicatione*	*Luxuria*
III	*De Filargiria*	*De Filargiria*	*Auaritia*
IV	*De Ira*	*De Ira*	*Inuidia*
V	*De Tristitia*	*De Tristitia*	*Ira*
VI	*De Accidia*	*De Accidia*	*Tristitia*
VII	*De Iactantia*	*De Cenodocxia*	*Uana Gloria*
VIII	*De Superbia*	*De Superbia*	(lost)

[712] Binchy, 'The Old-Irish Penitential', p. 49 and p. 258; and Kenney, *Sources*, p. 242.
[713] 'The Old-Irish Table of Commutations', D. A. Binchy (ed.), in Bieler, *Penitentials*. pp. 277-283.
[714] *Ibid*., §12, §21, and §27.
[715] '...hisin aralegasu fiadosom ind riaguil $_7$ ind pennatoir...', *The Monastery of Tallaght*, Edward J. Gwynn and W.J. Purton (eds. and trans.), 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 29 (1911/1912), pp. 127-164, §78.

sinner's weaker language, especially if he were a layman who had joined a monastic community for the expiation of his sins. The demand for the immediate and full confession in such a public situation may have necessitated the translation of penitential texts into a language more readily understood by a broader number of people, a process which may have been aided by the fact that these were not sacred texts but the collected teachings of several generations of penitential writers.

The first reference to murder in the Old-Irish Penitential comes under the heading of 'Gluttony': an individual who provokes drunkenness in another due to hate must do penance as if he had committed murder.[716] Perhaps it was considered that causing excessive drunkenness in another put innocent bystanders, and the unfortunate drunk himself, at risk of injury or death, such that the culpability rested upon not the drunk but the one who made him so. The fact that such inebriation was the result of hate may indicate that the sinner sough a pretext for murder, perhaps hoping to provoke a brawl in which he could appear to be defending himself against a conveniently impaired opponent, or perhaps that alcohol was a sufficiently dangerous substance in itself, which, when taken in excess, could lead to death, providing the culprit with the plausible excuse that the death was self-inflicted.

The Old-Irish Penitential judges that an individual who receives a reward for killing another must undergo three and a half years of penance.[717] The fact that this is half the term for the sin of premeditated murder may be indicative of the belief that the killer was not himself entirely culpable for the deed: it was not his hatred which sought death, but it was by his hand that it was accomplished. It may also be the case that, since penance is found under the heading of *Auaritia*, the sin being punished is not the killing itself but that of accepting a reward for doing so, such that the offender would also have to undertake a seven year term to expiate the sin of murder itself. Nothing is said of what was to befall the employer of such an assassin.

Though it was the Bigotian which introduced a specific penalty for kin-slaying (specifically, parricide), it is in the Old-Irish Penitential that we find the most detailed expression of this new sin. The killing of a son or daughter demands twenty-one years

[716] OI Pen., I §7.
[717] *Ibid*., III §9. The only text prior to this which noted the hiring of another individual to commit murder was the *Synodus I S. Patricii*, which demanded that the cleric who employed such services was himself guilty of homicide and was excommunicated; *Synodus Pat*., §31.

penance; of a parent, fourteen years; and of a sibling, aunt, or uncle, ten years.[718] The last punishment extends to the murder of all descendants as far as great-great-great-grandchildren.[719] Seven years of penance is applied to all other cases of homicide, unless the perpetrator is in orders, in which case the penalty is either exile or penance for life, to be decided by the king or the bishop.[720] If fines can be paid, the penitential punishment is reduced.[721] Those who have killed by using poison or drugs are to be treated as homicides, and must undertake seven years of penance; if victim did not die, the offender must still do three years of penance.[722] Killing in revenge for a parent or sibling requires four years or forty nights of penance.[723] Killing someone in a battle, a brawl, or by ambush requires a year and a half or forty nights of penance.[724] Accidental murder carries the punishment of a year's penance, while non-premeditated killing demands three years.[725] Eternal exile is demanded only in the case of one who, having taken a vow of renunciation, kills another intentionally, but this can be remitted with the consent of *ancarait craibdig*, 'pious confessors'.[726]

When compared to its predecessors, the Old-Irish Penitential sets itself apart, firstly, in its detailed provisions for kin-slaying, and, secondly, by its inherent use of what appear to be commutations for certain penances. While the Bigotian may have introduced a specific penance for killing one's father, the Old-Irish Penitential elaborates upon this simple injunction, providing specific penances for killing various family-members. What inspired such a change? Early Irish law recognised four circles of kinship: *gelfine* ('bright-kin', descendants of the same grandfather), *derbfine* ('true-kin', descendants of the same great-grandfather), *íarfine* ('after kin', descendants of the same great-great-grandfather), and *indfine* ('end-kin', descendants of the same great-great-great-grandfather).[727] The last of these groups corresponds to the threshold described in the Old-Irish Penitential, though the internal divisions within the extended kin-group are not recognised; a brother, sister, aunt, or uncle is not accorded the same penitential rights as the other noted members of their *gelfine*, but are included among the other three circles. These penances for killing various family-members may be evidence of an attempt to synchronise penitential demands with Irish law, which is

[718] OI Pen., V §2.
[719] *Ibid.*
[720] *Ibid.*
[721] *Ibid.*
[722] *Ibid.*, V §7.
[723] *Ibid.*, V §3.
[724] *Ibid.*, V §4.
[725] *Ibid.*, V §10.
[726] *Ibid.*, V §11.
[727] Kelly, *Law*, p. 312.

itself indicative of an attempt to integrate the penitential system into secular life, implying the availability of penance to the general population. The penance demanded for killing a parent mirrors that of the Bigotian for parricide (fourteen years); the killing of a son or daughter is twenty-one years, suggestive, perhaps, of the Church trying to discourage dynasts from killing their heirs.

Killing in revenge of a parent or sibling carries both a long-term and a short-term penance, as does killing in battle; it may have been the case that the standard long-term penance could be commuted into a shorter, presumably more arduous penitential term. The period demanded for killing in revenge does not correspond to any previous penitential, demanding four years where the Bigotian requires three; this may have been the result of a conscious decision to increase the penalty for revenge, but it may also be due to a scribal error, mistaking iii for iiii. The expansion of the forty-day penance for killing in battle first offered by Theodore to include killing in a brawl or by ambush seems curious as these new additions appear to be instances of unpremeditated killing and premeditated murder respectively, and are morally rather different to killing in battle. Considering that *cath* and *imairic* can both be translated as 'battle, conflict' (though Gwynn translates them as 'battle' and 'brawl'),[728] and that the list concludes with killing by ambush, it may be the case that a declining sequence of conflict is to be understood; that is, a battle involving large numbers, a skirmish between small groups, and an ambush by a handful of men. The fact that a longer term of penance is available to such sinners may imply that the forty-day penance was particularly arduous, but the sin itself remained of a different order to premeditated murder; the fact that the longer term is equal to half that of unpremeditated killing may be a recognition of the reduced culpability of the combatant, that his deed was intentional, but not committed in anger.

Killing by poison or drug is another curious addition; here the Old-Irish Penitential seems to be drawing on the 'Penitential of Theodore', where one who kills by potion or trick is considered a homicide.[729] In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon penitential, the Irish document allows for a reduced sentence if the victim survives, which offers an interesting reflection on the notion of the responsibility of the sinner: though the target did not die, the intent to kill

[728] See Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', p. 167. Binchy follows Gwynn's translation in his edition; see OI Pen., IV §4.
[729] '...si per poculum vel per artem aliquam VII annos aut plus...', U, i, IV §7.

was present. This penance also serves as further evidence that the compiler of the Old-Irish Penitential had more than the Bigotian before him as this sin is not noted in the latter text.

Another addition to the penitential system is the possibility to end perpetual penitential exile: the text notes that pious confessors can grant such a remission to one who killed after taking a vow. The demonstration of true repentance and regret may have freed the sinner to return to his monastery, perhaps to serve out the remainder of his penitential term among his own community.

The Old-Irish Penitential is, in many respects, the most nuanced, most elaborated penitential that is examined in this thesis, at least in terms of the sins of bloodshed. It demonstrates a greater degree of integration with secular customs, while remaining rooted in established penitential traditions. In taking the precepts of its predecessors and expanding upon them, this penitential may be indicative of a fundamental change in the understanding of sin itself, a process hinted at in the Bigotian: intent, while remaining important, is not the only factor in deciding the penance of a killer; a confessor must also consider the relationship of the victim to the offender.

5.4 The *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*

The *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* (hereafter *Hibernensis*) is a collection of decrees and statements drawn from synods, Scripture, Patristic sources, and esteemed religious figures, presumably designed to offer the Irish Church a comprehensive legal framework to operate within.[730] The text survives in two recensions, A and B; one manuscript of the former holds a colophon referring to two individuals, Cú Chuimne of Iona and Ruben of Dairinis (near Lismore in south Munster).[731] Cú Chuimne (whose name translates as 'hound of memory')

[730] Rob Meens, 'The uses of the Old Testament in early medieval canon law: the *Collectio Vetus Gallica* and the *Collectio Hibernensis*', in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 71-72; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 47-48. On the (substantial) borrowings of the *Hibernensis* from Continental collections of synodal decrees, see Luned Mair Davies, '*Statuta Ecclesia Antiqua* and the Gallic Councils in the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 14 (2000), pp. 87-110.

[731] The edition used for the present work – H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd ed. (Liepzieg, 1885) – is based on two manuscripts of the A recension; see Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The construction of the *Hibernensis*', in *Peritia* 12 (1998), p. 209 and p. 213. Wasserschleben's edition does not completely reflect the manuscript tradition, a complete investigation of which would be impractical for this work. On the names noted in the colophon of recension A, see Bart Jaski, 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 14 (2000), p. 52.

died in 747,[732] and is known to have composed a hymn and a poem, and may have been a student of Adomnán.[733] Ruben is referred to as *scriba Mumhan*, 'scribe of Munster', in his obituary notice of 725.[734] In recension A, the latest cited authority is Theodore of Canterbury (d. 690),[735] and in B, Adomnán of Iona (d. 704).[736] Due to this, and the ascription found in the colophon, it has been argued that recension A of the *Hibernensis* must have been written before 725,[737] such that B offers evidence of continued use and revision of the text. While it might be enticing to imagine that Cú Chuimne continued to work on the collection after the death of Ruben, as evidenced by his inclusion of canons attributed to the abbot of Iona, it has been argued that the collection of texts arrived on the Continent together, making A a Breton revision of the group, while B remains indicative of older, more Irish material,[738] which would imply that, rather than having been inserted, the sections ascribed to Adomnán were removed.

The *Hibernensis* is divided into a series of books covering a multitude of aspects of ecclesiastical life, including various grades of the clergy (Books I-VII), the role of kings (Book XXV), monks (Book XXXIX), martyrs (Book XLIX), and heretics (Book LVII), and, of course, certain penitential matters (Book XLVII). The compilers of the text present us with various references to authorities to defend a given position, yet there are frequent contradictions (one of which concerning bloodshed will be discussed presently) that would lead one to believe that this work is merely designed to present all relevant evidence from all possible trustworthy sources, while refraining from judging which is best. This lack of

[732] AU 747.5. He is noted as being a *sapiens* in his obit.
[733] Jaski, 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*', p. 53.
[734] AU 725.4.
[735] Charles-Edwards has identified both the implicit and explicit references to both the *Dacheriana* and the 'Penitential of Theodore' in the *Hibernensis*; see Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', pp. 172-174. Only one of these correlations is relevant to the present work: *Hibernensis*, I §22; D, §79 and §136; and U, i, IV §5.
[736] While there is no edition of recension B, this reference to Adomnán is noted by Bradshaw in his letter to Wasserschleben, which is included in the in the latter's edition; Henry Bradshaw in Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, p. lxx. It is interesting to note that the group of manuscripts in which both versions of the *Hibernensis* are found also contains the *Canones Adamnani*, a series of canons, as we have seen, ascribed to Adomnán; see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 21, and Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', p. 145.
[737] It has been hypothesised that the *Hibernensis* could have only come into being when the traditional *Hibernensi* and orthodox *Romani* factions were at some degree of peace, perhaps some time after 688/689, when Adomnán was converted to the Dionysian Easter, and then converted the northern Irish communities, except Iona itself and its dependencies, which would not change their position until 716; see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 410.
[738] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', pp. 145-146. It has also been suggested that A is the older and by Ruben based on its textual and geographic relationship to the secular law-code known as Nero A vii *Bretha Nemed*, which was itself written in Munster in 721x74; Liam Breathnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia* 3, (1984), pp. 455-457.

comment or discussion of the various references, whether they are accepted as being correct or not, may have been helpful to the medieval scholar who sought guidance on a given issue, perhaps favouring one authority over another, but it provides the modern scholar with a certain degree of ambiguity as to which of the recorded practices were preferred and persisted, and which were canonical relics noted only as a result of thorough scholarship.

Since much has been made of the division between the *Hibernenses* and the *Romani* (two broad factions that disagreed over the dating of Easter and tonsure, the former being traditionalists, the leading establishment of which in this period was Iona, with the latter advocating conformity with Roman practices, firmly established in the southern half of Ireland), it may be puzzling at first to see evidence of cooperation between these two parties in the construction of a document that would compile the fundamental teachings of the Church. It may be the case that the controversy has been over-emphasized in the historical record, that the divide was heightened for political aims, or had been rendered irrelevant by the time of the compilation of the *Hibernensis*, such that, on the ground, the competing Churches of the Irish did broadly agree and cooperate with one another.[739] The various canons attributed to *Romani* and *Hibernenses* that we find in the *Hibernensis* do not overtly disagree, suggesting that the compilers chose to omit contradictions,[740] while at the same time it is a work which serves as testament to the success of the *Romani*.[741] Personal relationships between foundations may also have created a sense of underlying unity or cooperation, and it may be the case that Ruben was, through his father, in contact with Iona.[742]

It is interesting to note that, given that in some respects they cover similar material, the various Penitentials discussed in this thesis are not referred to directly in the *Hibernensis*. It may be that they were not held in sufficient esteem (which seems unlikely), that it was believed that Theodore superseded them, or perhaps simply that they all drew on the same body of texts and synods such that it was deemed better to refer to the sources of the Penitentials, rather than the Penitentials themselves. An example of this may be seen where both Cummian and the *Hibernensis* refer to Ecclesiasticus 3:33 to argue that, just as water quenches fire, alms wash away sin.[743] Though they were based in Scriptural precedent,

[739] Jaski, 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*', pp. 61-63.
[740] Roy Flechner, 'An Insular Tradition of Ecclesiastical Law: Fifth to Eighth Century', in James Graham-Campbell and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations Before the Vikings* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 40-42.
[741] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer*, Quiggin Pamphlet on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 4 (Cambridge, 1999), p. 6.
[742] Jaski, 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*', pp. 55-57.
[743] Compare *Paen. Cumm.*, *Prologus* §4, and *Hibernensis*, XIII §2.

synodal decrees, and the teachings of Church Fathers, the Penitentials were handbooks for confessors, practical guides expressing the considered opinions of specific, highly esteemed individuals, such as Finnian, Columbanus, Cummian, and Theodore; these were not works formulated and endorsed by synods, they had not been approved by the papacy, nor could all of their purgative prescriptions be found in the Bible. These simple facts alone may have precluded their inclusion in the *Hibernensis*.

Only two books of this work are explicitly concerned with penitential matters. The first, *De peccantibus sub gradu*,[744] focuses primarily on the penance of those in clerical orders, while the second, *De penitentia*, is more general in scope.[745] In brief, the former would appear to advise that bishops who commit sin are to be removed from office, going so far as to recommend excommunication, though they may return to their position if they undergo penance,[746] and that those under orders who have lapsed or committed crimes may be redeemed if they undertake pilgrimage and serve under the hands of an abbot[747] or endure penance with tears.[748] Noting that some individuals may have had their offices revoked, and who have not yet been restored (presumably having undertaken penance), the text underlines that some crimes (carnal sin is the example used) are too grave to allow the offending party to resume their role.[749] The term of penance is stated to be seven years, citing as precedent Isidore's reference to a biblical episode involving Mary, sister of Moses and Aaron, who was shut out from the camp for seven days as punishment for speaking out against Moses' marriage to an Ethiopian.[750]

De penitentia offers a more detailed examination of penance. Beginning with a passage from Augustine, direct reference is made to penance washing away crimes by

[744] *Hibernensis*, XI: *De peccatibus sub gradu*, pp. 30-32.
[745] *Ibid*., XLVII: *De penitentia*, pp. 196-202.
[746] *Ibid*., XI §1.
[747] Considering the relationship of this text to Iona, we might see here an oblique reference to Librán of the reed-plot; *VC*, II 39. This demand for pilgrimage to another monastic centre also echoes Cummian, who demands that one who has killed, if they have taken orders, must live in perpetual exile, and, indeed, Finnian, who states that any cleric who commits this sin must do penance in another 'city'; see *Pen. Vinn.*, §23, and *Paen. Cumm.*, IV §8. This may be indicative of the fact that, while they are not explicitly mentioned in the *Hibernensis*, the Penitentials are expressing commonly held traditions within the various Irish Churches.
[748] *Hibernensis*, XI §3 and §4. The shedding of tears in repentance is a common theme; for example, *Paen. Cumm., Prologus* §5.
[749] *Hibernensis*, XI §5. We might surmise that bloodshed would also result in a similar decision, considering how it is often grouped together with carnal crimes.
[750] *Ibid*., XI §6. The biblical episode in question is found in Numbers 12. One might wonder how seven days became seven years, but this justification is considerably less convincing as the source of this particular punishment when one notes that seven year penitential terms are found in pre-Isidorian texts, such as the four British texts and the Penitential of Finnian.

fountains of tears,[751] and that, in confession, one must freely admit all sins as God does not wish to avenge the faults of those who have been compelled to confess.[752] Indeed, since confession is deemed to be medicinal, it is in the sinner's own interest to confess fully, such that the measure of his punishment equates to the level of his sinfulness.[753] This emphasis on weeping and tears washing away sin is reiterated at several points,[754] and it is made clear that one should approach confession with humility.[755] It is also noted that alms may expiate sin.[756] The text would also appear to suggest that penance must be undertaken at a church (or a holy site),[757] presumably so that it can be ensured that it is approached with all due gravity and completed appropriately. This may point to the elusive *teg pende*, 'house of penance',[758] but it may simply be a demand for penitents to be present in a holy site when praying, weeping, participating in vigils, or providing alms. The sick must do penance,[759] and the dying cannot be denied communion.[760] Penitents who have died by chance without final absolution are even accounted for, such that alms, prayers, and oblations can be given in their memory,[761] and those who are ill or frenzied may be reconciled on the evidence of another, and have the Eucharist poured down their mouth.[762] It is also noted that, while God's vengeance may appear to be slow, it will eventually punish all sins, even if it is necessary that later generations suffer,[763] an argument designed, presumably, to encourage all individuals to confess and do penance to save not only themselves, but their descendants. In contrast to this, at a later point the text states that the sins of the father will not be paid for by his sons.[764] This is a perfect example of the many contradictory statements found in the *Hibernensis*, such that its design seems to account for all arguments and situations, allowing the user (presumably a bishop) to tailor his evidence to suit the needs of a given situation. There does not appear to

[751] '...penitentia diluit crimina in fontibus lacrimarum...', *ibid*., XLVII §1.
[752] '...quo confiteri delicta persuadet', *ibid*., XLVII §2.
[753] *Ibid*., XLVII §19. In *Hibernensis*, XXVII §12 we find a quotation from the Epistle of James 5:16 that exhorts Christians to confess their sins to one another so that they may be saved; the term used is *saluemini*, which conveys a sense of health or well-being.
[754] *Ibid*., XLVII §3, §5, and §8; the last of these, *De penitentia cum lacrimis agenda*, deals specifically with weeping in penance, and refers to the Bible, Origen, and an unspecified 'synod of Rome'.
[755] *Ibid*., XLVII §3 and §5.
[756] *Ibid*., XLVII §7 and XXVII §12.
[757] *Ibid*., XLVII §13.
[758] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §66.
[759] *Hibernensis*, XLVII §11.
[760] *Ibid*., XLVII §12.
[761] *Ibid*., XLVII §15.
[762] *Ibid*., XLVII §16. One might wonder how a 'frenzied' individual would undertake penance in the first place, unless this 'frenzy' is an intermittent affliction, perhaps an early record of a malady such as epilepsy.
[763] *Ibid*., XXVII §13. We might see in this an attempt to reinforce through Church law the implications of the condemnation of certain kings who crossed particular saints, and how their kingdoms ultimately came to ruin generations later, the best example being, perhaps, St Patrick's treatment of the sons of Niall.
[764] *Ibid*., XXXI §1.

be any remarkable differences between this text and the Penitentials in terms of the nature and application of penance, which may hint at a broad degree of conformity, but may also be a consequence of the lack of specificity in the *Hibernensis* concerning the practice of penance. In this light of this ambiguity, it is all the more useful to examine this text in terms of a specific sin, such as bloodshed.

Scattered throughout the *Hibernensis* are numerous references to bloodshed and violence. In the very first book we are told that a bishop who kills another bishop or a presbyter is to be judged by a king, and that he cannot relinquish his territory, or move into another, without the judgement of other bishops and having completed great supplication.[765] Equally, clerics who encourage others to violence or killing are to be called murderers themselves, and are excommunicated.[766] The *Hibernensis* states that the testimony of one witness is not sufficient to put somebody to death, two or three are required,[767] a clear acceptance of execution as a means of punishment. In a chapter concerning kings, it appears to be suggested that rulers can wage war, though, since the example of David and Solomon is used, only with divine sanction, and that an aspect of the role of a king is to kill and

[765] *Ibid*., I §22. This decree, which appears under the title *De episcopo excommunicando, qui aliena rapit*, apparently draws on both the 'Penitential of Theodore' and the *Dacheriana*; compare to D §79 and §136, and U, i, IV §5 . Charles-Edwards notes this implicit citation of Theodore in the *Hibernensis*; Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', p. 142, n. 5. There is a curious difference between who the offender may be in each of these three examples; all three canons state variations of 'Qui autem episcopum vel presbyterum occiderit, regi ad judicandum remittendus est' (this is the version found in the *Hibernensis*). In the 'Penitential of Theodore', this decree is found among a series of penances which could apparently apply to any individual in society, while the *Dacheriana* is sufficiently vague so as to allow the same interpretation, though the preceding canons concern clergy and monks; in the *Hibernensis* however, it appears alongside sins committed by, not against, bishops. It may be worthwhile to reproduce the entire section from the *Hibernensis*:

Cap. 22: *De episcopo excommunicando, qui aliena rapit*.

a. *Sinodus*: Episcopus, qui alterius episcopi parochiam rapit, excommunicandus est, nisi legitimo ordine peniteat a pace et missa et mensa.
b. Qui autem episcopum vel presbyterum occiderit, regi ad judicandum remittendus est.
c. Episcopus non exeat ad aliam parochiam et suam relinquat, nisi multorum episcoporum judicio et maxime supplicatione perficiat.

The canon in question, (b), is clearly placed between two sections concerning bishops, under a chapter that is explicitly about the excommunication of bishops. Given the nature of the *Hibernensis*, that it is a text that was, in essence, cut and pasted from a variety of sources, it is easy to imagine that (b) was simply inserted among other sins concerning bishops without regard for its content. One cannot help but wonder if it would have appeared to the contemporary reader that (b) is dependent on (a), making the killer of a bishop a bishop himself.

[766] *Hibernensis*, X x. This section would seem to draw upon *Synodus Pat.*, §31. It is interesting to note that this canon is entitled *De multimodis causis clericorum. Synodus Kartanginensis*, and that *Hibernensis*, I §10 also refers to a '*Sinodus Cartag.*'. This may be due to a confusion on behalf of the Irish compliers, attributing the decrees to a synod assumed to have taken place at Lismore (mother-house to Ruben's Dar-Inis), known euphemistically as 'Carthage' after its founder, Carthagus, when in fact it is drawn from the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, the Spanish version of which was known as *Sinodus Carthaginensis*; see Davies, '*Statuta Ecclesia Antiqua* and the Gallic Councils in the *Hibernensis*', pp. 89-90.

[767] *Hibernensis*, XVI §§7-8.

condemn,[768] perhaps as an illustration of their legal rights and obligations. It is emphasised later in the text that certain relationships merit punishments, especially if they go against the will of God.[769] Furthermore, it is stated that a minister of the Lord is one who strikes evil with tools of slaughter, *uasa interfectionis*, and it is made clear that this is the duty of the king, as the Church cannot inflict punishment.[770] Indeed, this particular passage goes on to offer examples which argue that to punish murderers and the sacrilegious does not qualify as bloodshed, but rather as the law of God, such that priests who spare sinners are causing harm to the Church.[771] It is prohibited, however, to kill evil people on feast days,[772] and the Church is obliged to protect penitent homicides.[773] Taken together, these stipulations appear to outline a very specific relationship between the Church and kings: kings require the authority of the Church to wage war, and the Church requires kings to enforce the application of its laws and defend its rights. A king who acts on behalf of the Church to punish criminals, and perhaps violently so, is not only just but a tool of the divine will, yet the Church is still obliged to protect the sincere penitent who committed a severe crime. This is the very same relationship that Adomnán was advancing in his *Vita Columbae* and *Cáin*, that a king could employ violence under the guidance of a righteous authority.

The *Hibernensis* also provides instances for the non-liability of someone who killed another by accident,[774] and discusses the necessary punishments for one guilty of involuntary killing, *homicidii non sponte*, such that the offender must undertake seven years of penance, after five of which they may receive the Eucharist, which appears to be a reference to the Synod of Ancyra (314),[775] though Dionysius is credited with the ordinance. Presumably this is Dionysius Exiguus; the Irish expedition to Rome in 632 could easily have transported

[768] *Ibid*., XXV §17. If the compilers of the *Hibernensis* had access to Theodore's Penitential, it is curious that they did not include his specific penance for killing in combat, which would seem complimentary to the consent offered to kings to wage war. Perhaps in seeking to create a text which would appeal to the broadest number of competing ecclesiastical factions certain controversial elements were simply omitted; it may have been the case such an acquiescence was simply a step too far for the Irish Church at this time, or, indeed, that, given the confused nature of Theodore's penitential works, Ruben and Cú Chuimne were not aware of the penance for killing in combat.
[769] *Ibid*., XXVII §7.
[770] *Ibid*., XXVII §8.
[771] *Ibid*.
[772] *Ibid*., XXVII §26.
[773] *Ibid*., XXVIII §4.
[774] *Ibid*., XXVIII §2. The example given is of an axe-head coming loose and killing a companion.
[775] *Ibid*., XXVIII §5. It is interesting to note that this is not an accurate transmission of this decree: the synod of Ancyra stated that an earlier council allowed a penitent killer to return to communion after seven or five years, which appears to be a reference to the synod of Elvira which imposed a seven year term for wilful murder and a five year period for involuntary homicide; see *The Synod of Ancyra*, §22, and *The Synod of Elvira*, §5.

copies of his works (and others) back to Ireland,[776] which may have included collections of older synodal decrees. Adding to the confusion, it is stated that *Disputatio Romana* debates this ordinance, offering two definitions: the first demands the offender *perfectioni mancipetur*, which we might interpret as the offender undertaking a permanent state of penance, and the second imposes a pilgrimage of seven years or remaining under the protection of the Church until the end of their life.[777] The *Hibernensis* does not itself offer any resolution, resulting in the situation whereby involuntary killing could be punished by a fixed term of penance, pilgrimage, or a permanent state of penance. Strangely, the *Hibernensis*, referring to Numbers 35:26-27, appears to allow for a situation where by a non-voluntary killer may themselves be killed by an avenger, but only if they are outside the limits of a 'city'.[778] Since the only foundations approximating cities in early medieval Ireland were ecclesiastical centres, it may be that what we find here is the Church delineating its right as a refuge, while coming to terms with the secular right to carry out a blood-feud.[779] This protection is not extended, however, to one who ambushes and kills their neighbour, and then flees to a *civitas refugii*,[780] presumably as this is clearly an incidence of premeditated murder. Turning to homicides wilfully undertaken, the *Hibernensis* advocates that the offender submit to perpetual penance, or undertake a fixed term of seven years.[781] This passage in the *Hibernensis* also records the decision of the 'First Synod of Patrick', where murder requires only one year of penance.[782] In short, the *Hibernensis* records the suggested punishment for voluntary homicides to be a state of permanent penance, but also fixed terms of seven or one years.

[776] This expedition to Rome was a consequence of the Synod of Mag Léne, held to address the growing concern over the Paschal controversy in Ireland. These events are reported to us by Cummian in his letter to Ségéne, fifth abbot of Iona; see Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, pp. 3-7, and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 408-409.
[777] *Hibernensis*, XXVIII §5.
[778] *Ibid.*, XXVIII §6.
[779] On the legal standing of the blood-feud in secular law, see Kelly, *Law*, p. 31, and pp. 126-127.
[780] *Hibernensis*, XXVIII, §7.
[781] *Ibid.*, XXVIII §10. The synod of Ancyra appears to be the source for the demand for perpetual penance, though again it is attributed to Dionysius, and the seven year penance is credited to an unspecified 'Irish Synod'; see *The Synod of Ancyra*, §22. A seven year penance for homicide, performed on bread and water, is found in *Canones Hibernenses*, I §2. This decision is immediately followed by one that both confirms its predecessor and offers the caveat that a certain Monochoma suggested a penance of ten years; *Canones Hibernenses*, I §3. This may be the record of the unnamed 'Irish Synod' referred to in the *Hibernensis*.
[782] Compare *Synodus Pat.*, §14 and *Hibernensis*, XXVIII §10.

An individual who kills a thief in the night is innocent of murder, according to the *Hibernensis*.[783] This stipulation may have been influenced by, or have influenced, a similar condition in early Irish law.[784] Whoever violates the relics of bishops or martyrs by murder must undertake a penitential pilgrimage of seven years, unless it is a holy place where the laity are welcome, then the term is reduced to one year.[785] This stipulation only serves to confuse matters further: if it were the case that killing an individual carried a punishment of seven years penance, are we to understand that the addition of pilgrimage is to atone for violating the sanctity of the relics? If so, is the murderer who commits his crime in a place where relics are kept that is open to the laity only to undertake one year of penance, or to incorporate one year of pilgrimage into his seven years of penance? It would seem more likely that the pilgrimage is an additional task. The difference in periods of pilgrimage for the violation of 'public' and 'private' relics is interesting, perhaps serving as an indication that the Church expected the laity to behave in a violent fashion, and so the likelihood of such a crime was not negligible, or that the 'public' relics were of a lower quality fit only for display to the impure laity. This may be a consequence of the division of an ecclesiastical site into three regions, *sanctissimus*, *sanctior*, *sanctus*;[786] perhaps only certain relics were displayed in the least holy area, which was open to the laity. For any layman who provides leadership to barbarians which results in bloodshed (of Christians specifically, one would presume), there is levied a penance of fourteen years.[787] This is justified as penance of seven years for killing an innocent, and seven years for leading others in this cause.[788] This scenario bears some resemblance to the Penitential of Cummian, where it is stated that one who guides barbarians must do penance for fourteen years if there is no slaughter of Christians, but if such violence does occur they must surrender their arms and become dead unto the world.[789] This is a considerably harsher punishment than that found in the *Hibernensis*, and is based on the

[783] *Hibernensis*, XXIX §5. It is noted by Wasserschleben that in two of the codices we find additional material, *Hibernensis*, XXIX §2 (b), where it is recorded that a Roman Censor named Fabius had his own son killed as punishment for committing crimes of theft.
[784] Kelly, *Law*, pp. 128-129.
[785] *Hibernensis*, XLIV, §8.
[786] *Ibid.*, XLIV, §5. This is a rather confusing passage as it refers to four areas, yet names only three, and also of these three refers to the laity being allowed to enter the first, and the clergy the second – what of the third? Etchingham also muddies the waters somewhat when he states, without clarification, that 'The third, known as *sanctus* 'holy', allows in *laicos homicidas* 'homicidal layfolk' and *adulteros* 'adulterers' (XLIV §5)'; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 316. This addition is not part of the main edition, appearing only in a footnote, which is, as I understand it, found in only one manuscript example; see *Hibernensis*, XLIV §5 (e). This may have been a later addition to resolve the confusing situation we are presented with, and may not be original, and so may not apply to the Irish Church.
[787] *Hibernensis*, LIX §2 and §3.
[788] *Ibid.*, LIX §3.
[789] *Paen. Cumm.*, IX §13.

Sinodus luci uictorie, which imposes thirteen years penance for guiding barbarians, and, if bloodshed occurs, a permanent laying down of arms and penance.[790] It is also interesting to note that the *Hibernensis* states that both of its examples are taken from an unspecified *Sinodus Hibernensis*.[791] It may be that the *Sinodus luci uictorie*, known to be a source of Cummian's, was mistaken for an Irish synod and altered to agree with the term of the Penitential or for symmetry.[792]

The *Hibernensis* offers no specific teaching on the penance for the various forms of killing, it merely records all variations. It does, however, illustrate that the relationship between the Church and secular authority advocated in hagiography was now entrenched in canon law. The Church was also underlining its role as a centre of refuge, of its right to protect its penitents, even murderers, from outside interference, and to act as the arbiter of justice. This document, in spite of its lack of commentary or specific decisions, seems to expect that the laity would seek confession and willingly submit to penance for the various forms of killing; no mention is made of such services being limited to specific categories of society. Indeed, one might presume that, if kings were acting on behalf of the Church, meting out violent and fatal punishment with ecclesiastical sanction, they, their families, and their clients might have a reasonable expectation to pastoral care, including the rite of penance.

5.5 Prescriptive Texts Influenced by Theodore

The Penitential ascribed to Theodore marks a key change in penitential thought: it may have been understood that the Penitentials, especially in the case of the sins of bloodshed, were designed for the guidance of an individual who acted only on his own behalf, guilty of violating the social order, leaving those who had killed as part of a social obligation out in the cold. When the handbooks were exported to Britain, this distinction may have been lost, such that Theodore may have felt that he was closing an obvious omission in the system of penance described in the little Irish book. The Irish Church clearly struggled with this issue,

[790] *Sinodus luci*, §4. The thirteen year period, *.xiii. annis*, is, in one manuscript, rendered as *.xiiii.*; see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 68, *apparatus*. One can easily see how a scribe could make a simple mistake concerning the number of years required. It would be interesting if the thirteen years of the *Sinodus luci uictorie* was in fact correct, but future ecclesiastics preferred the symmetry of fourteen years.
[791] *Hibernensis*, LIX §3.
[792] Compare *Hibernensis*, LIX §3, *Paen. Cumm.*, IX §13, and *Sinodus luci*, §4.

as demonstrated by the aspects of the hagiographical traditions of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick, and the *Cáin Adomnáin*: when a man was required to kill by nature of his duties to his lord, was he guilty of murder? The *Cáin*, while not granting an avenue for the remission of such a sin, sets out the rules of just action in conflict, such that a warrior is only punished if he kills an innocent. The killing of warriors by warriors may have been (begrudgingly) tolerated by the Irish Church as an inescapable aspect of society, and so remained outside of the penitential system. What may have been self-evident to an Irish confessor may have been unknown to Theodore. It may also have been the case that he was compelled to integrate socially demanded forms of killing, such as revenge, into the penitential system out of pastoral concerns, recognising the difference between murder and vengeance. Whatever the case may have been, the Archbishop created a new set of penances which altered the focus of penance somewhat, recognising not just intent but social obligation.

Transported back to Ireland, Theodore's teachings on these new penances for killing took root, perhaps in soil prepared by the attitudes displayed in the *Vitae* and *Cáin*, harmonised with the traditions established in Cummian, giving rise to the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials. The Bigotian especially appears to display this attempt to synchronise Cummian with Theodore: it does not seem to offer a completely revised and integrated set of rulings on the sins of bloodshed, but rather notes specific changes or nuances, including the sin of parricide. It may have been the case that it was supposed to be used in tandem with Cummian, or that it was simply not concerned with certain aspects of lay killing (as noted previously). The Old Irish Penitential is elaborates greatly on forms of kin-slaying and even offers a potential end to perpetual exile for a penitent killer. It may have been the case that, by introducing a new way of viewing penance as separate from intent, that Theodore opened the door for Irish confessors to further refine the penitential system, delineating the severity of killing one's own family members, for example, as a crime more serious and separate from homicide itself.

The *Hibernensis*, by its very nature as a collection, rather than a commentary or investigation, of canon law is considerably more ambiguous concerning matters of penance. It does, however, reveal a distinctly different tone concerning the sins of bloodshed when compared to the Penitentials. From Finnian to Cummian, the focus of penance is on the expiation of sin, offering few hints at practice or organisation, and with no political aims; the *Hibernensis* is overtly concerned with the role of secular authorities and their relationship to the Church. This may be as a result of Theodore's accommodation of secular necessities, but

it may equally have been due to the Irish Church's own adaptation and integration into the secular world, an expression of the 'nation-building' or of the ecclesiastical-secular relationship envisioned by Adomnán. These attitudes and aspirations may be evidenced by attraction of the authors of the *Hibernensis* (and, indeed, Adomnán) to the Old Testament for precedent of how a partnership between secular kingdoms and God's chosen representatives (*i.e*., the Church) ought to behave towards one another. As a consequence of its growing influence and position is society, the Irish Church had to be willing to mould, perhaps even bend, its views and practices to make them acceptable, or simply tolerable, to secular authorities. In this light, the *Hibernensis* is, in a certain sense, an aspect of the same dialogue witnessed in the hagiographies of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick, that violence and bloodshed could be prosecuted under a legitimate authority yet not be considered tantamount to the most serious sin of homicide. As a whole, these texts present a Church that accepts, even advocates, violence to pursue certain aims, and which can offer forgiveness for the sin of bloodshed. The *Hibernensis* moves beyond the scope of the Penitentials, seeking to offer a framework for a Christian society, as led by the Church, and in doing so it is forced to compromise with the brutal reality, and pervasive violence, of the secular world.[793]

The texts examined in this chapter illustrate what was perhaps the enduring feature of the Insular Churches: innovation and adaptation tempered by tradition. One might expect that Theodore's determination to ensure orthodoxy throughout his jurisdiction may have led to substantial changes within even the Irish Churches, and, at first glance, that may appear to be the case. Theodore's revision of Cummian's Penitential seems to have carved a new path in terms of bloodshed that both the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials followed; however, the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials do not simply rely on Theodore's Penitential, but integrate it into ecclesiastical Irish customs, and expand on its teachings. The authors of these texts were not adopting but adapting Theodore's thought, and, when taken in context with the saints' Lives, his most striking contribution, that of penance for killing in conflict, fits within an already developing framework of clerical support for violence under specific circumstances. Theodore recognises the same distinction, though his criteria are very different, as Adomnán between legitimate and illegitimate forms of killing, a new factor beyond intentionality in determining the culpability of the sinner and the penance they must

[793] Evidence of such collusion between the secular and the ecclesiastic worlds can be seen in the *Bretha Nemed* (see n. 738), the composition of which is attributed to three kinsmen: Forannán, a bishop, Máel Tuile, a poet and historian, and Báethgalach hua Búirecháin, a judge; see Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland', pp. 441-444, and p. 459.

suffer. This new idea, of there being circumstances under which killing could be a legitimate act, a sin which could be atoned for with striking brevity, would have enduring consequences on the nature of penance and the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authorities.

Chapter 6: The Clients of God

6.1 A Rare Witness

The Old-Irish Penitential, encountered in the last chapter, is associated with the monastery of Tallaght. In this chapter, this monastery, the individuals associated with it, and some of their literary products will be investigated as they offer a unique insight into the penitential practice of a nebulous group of ecclesiasts and secular figures which would inspire the movement known as the *céli Dé*, the 'clients of God'.

The Old Irish text known as *The Monastery of Tallaght* is an unusual work,[794] seemingly being a record of the teachings and practices of two individuals, Máel Ruain,[795] the founder of the establishment at Tallaght,[796] and his disciple, Máel Díthraib.[797] The writer of the text, though anonymous, speaks as if familiar with the details of the daily routine of the site, and even refers to a penance imposed upon him,[798] and, while he may not have known the founder, he was familiar with the disciple.[799] Considering the relationship between the author and the disciple, it is possible to date the work to the period around 840,[800] which would roughly correlate with the language of the period the text was written in.[801] Associated with this text is another piece of writing known as 'The Teaching of Máel Ruain',[802] which

[794] It should be noted that the surviving manuscript of this text, sometimes referred to as the Tallaght Codex (Dublin, RIA, MS 3 B 23), also contains copies of the Old Irish Penitential and the Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations, all three of which are associated with the *céli Dé*; see Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, p. 102.
[795] The death of Máel Ruain is recorded in AU 792.1, where he and Aedán grandson of Cú Chumbu are referred to as an *episcopi ⁊ milites Christi*.
[796] The name 'Tallaght' derives from the Old Irish *tamlachta*, which means something akin to 'plague-grave'; see Gene C. Haley, 'Tamlachta: The Map of Plague Burials and Some Implications for Early Irish History', in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 22 (2002), p. 97.
[797] Máel Díthraib, referred to as a *sapiens* and anchorite of Tír dá Glas, died in 841; *The Annals of Clonmacnoise: from the earliest period to A.D. 1408*, Conell Mageoghagan (trans.) and Denis Murphy (ed.) (Dublin, 1896), 838 (corrected to 841; see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 300). It is interesting to note that his name literally translates as 'servant/devotee of the wilderness/uninhabited place', presumably a reflection of his position as an anchorite.
[798] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §45.
[799] Gwynn and Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', p. 121, and *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §40.
[800] Gwynn and Purton offer the period 831x840 for the period of composition, based on references to Diarmait of Iona in the text; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §47, §65, and §80; and Gwynn and Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', p. 122.
[801] Old Irish was used from the seventh to ninth centuries, with Middle Irish rising to the fore from 900 to 1200; see Kim McCone, 'An tSean-Ghaeilge agus a Réamhstair', in Kim McCone, *et al*, *Stair na Gaeilge* (Maynooth, 1994), p. 61, and Liam Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', in McCone, *Stair na Gaeilge*, p. 221.
[802] 'The Teaching of Máel Ruain', Edward J. Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *The Rule of Tallaght*, *Hermathena*, XLIV, 2nd supplemental volume (1927), pp. 1-63. It should be noted that the surviving manuscript is incomplete, breaking off mid-sentence.

also describes the practices of Tallaght at the time of its founder. Though it is written in Middle Irish, it appears to draw from an Old Irish exemplar.[803] The later again 'Rule of the *Céli Dé*'[804] may also be grouped with these two texts as they all appear to derive from the same ultimate source, known only as the *sein-leabhar* (the 'old book'), presumably composed at Tallaght sometime between 815 and 840.[805] Each of these texts have been associated with the *céli Dé*, an ascetic movement which may have begun in the late eighth century,[806] though this connection has recently been called into question (a debate which will be discussed presently).[807] Very few biographical details are known of Máel Ruain, other than the date of his death in 792, and his connection to Tallaght; nothing is known of Máel Díthraib, other than the date of his death.[808]

There is a level of uncertainty concerning when the *céli Dé* came into being as an active reform movement: the earliest references to this term in the early medieval period do not appear to suggest an organisation but rather a particular religious status. The name itself, 'clients of God', was probably the Irish counterpart to *seruus Dei*.[809] While it is accepted that this term did begin as a more general appellation equivalent to *manach*/*monachus*, and subsequently came to be associated with a specific reform movement, when exactly this

[803] Gwynn, *The Rule of Tallaght*, p. vii.
[804] *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, Edward J. Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *The Rule of Tallaght, Hermathena*, XLIV, 2nd supplemental volume (1927), pp. 64-87.
[805] Gwynn, *The Rule of Tallaght*, pp. xi-xiii, and pp. xix-xxi. A detailed examination of the relationship between the surviving texts and the *sein-leabhar* is provided in Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 102-117.
[806] Peter O'Dwyer, 'The *Céli Dé* Reform', in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa; Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 83
[807] It has been argued that a reconsideration of Máel Ruain's connection to the *céli Dé* is required, taking into account the fact that there is no contemporary evidence to suggest such an association, and that the *céli Dé*, as a movement, did not arise until the tenth century, such that the term '*céli Dé*' before this time was simply a vernacular translation (of sorts) for *miles Christi*; see Chris Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church: a reassessment', *Studia Hibernica*, 34 (2006-2007), p. 19, pp. 39-44, and pp. 60-62.
[808] While there is no entry on Máel Díthraib in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, a brief biographical note on Máel Ruain can be found which offers little more than has already been noted above; see Charles Doherty, 'Leinster, saints of', in *OxDNB*, vol. 33, p. 279.
[809] Peter O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé: spiritual reform in Ireland, 750-900* (Dublin, 1981), pp. 16-17. O'Dwyer argues that *céle* (plural, *céli*) must be translated as *seruus* in the sense of 'total dependence'; *ibid*., p. 17. Lambkin convincingly dispels this, arguing that 'such an idea was alien to the native Irish concept of *célsine*', which is more accurately translated as 'contract of service', such that he regards the concept of the *céli Dé* as being thoroughly aristocratic, with the connotation of inter-dependence between the *céle* and the *flaith*, the client and the lord, which is to say the spiritual elite and their God; see Brian Lambkin, 'Blathmac and the *Céili Dé*: a reappraisal', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), pp. 140-144; see also Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, p. 1, n. 2. It is interesting to note that, in the ninth century Old Irish version of her Life, Brigit twice encounters what she refers to as *céli Dé*; *BB*, §13 and §35. In the first, all we are told is that Brigit steals her father's property and gives it to these 'clients of God' (who may be lepers), but, in the second, the 'clients of God' are explicitly described as being lepers, and they do not appear to be very charitable individuals, refusing to allow Brigit to use her own chariot, which she had just given to them, to carry a sick man. The defining characteristics of the *céli Dé*, as they appear in this text, would be that they are lepers who receive donations. This would lend credence to the idea that the term *céli Dé* was not specifically associated with a reform movement before the tenth century, but was simply an appellation for individuals of (supposedly) singular sanctity.

change occurred – and therefore when the movement came into being – is disputed. O'Dwyer appears to connect the use of this term in *The Monastery of Tallaght* to the movement,[810] while noting that phrase only became specifically associated with monks of 'stricter observance' in the early ninth century,[811] with Tallaght and Findglas as the focus of the *céli Dé* movement. This reform was inspired, apparently, by figures such as Fer Dá Crích, abbot of Dairinis,[812] Mac Oige of Lismore,[813] and Samthann, abbess of Cluain Brónaig,[814] and was in progress during the lifetime of Máel Ruain and Dublitir,[815] all of whom had died by the end of the eighth century. This leaves us with a situation where, while they may have been 'clients of God' in the broadest sense, none of these individuals was part of the reform movement known as the *céli Dé*, but they were collectively its inspiration. Máel Díthraib and the author of *The Monastery of Tallaght* would have lived during the time when the term became associated with strict monastic observance, according to O'Dwyer, which may have shaped and altered their recollection and interpretation of their sources.

The notion that the *céli Dé* were a response to a certain degree of laxity of faith in Ireland has been challenged in recent years,[816] as has the attribution of numerous texts to the movement.[817] Follett ultimately concludes that the *céli Dé* were not a reform movement, but simply a category of religious individuals of particular rigour within a monastery,[818] which

[810] O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, p. 18.
[811] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[812] There are four candidates for this Fer Dá Crích: the first died in 722, and is merely noted as being the son of Congalach; the second was the abbot of Imleach and of Lethglenn, and died in 742; the third was of Dar-Inis, died 747; and finally, an abbot of Armagh who died in 768; see AU 722.4, AT 742.8, AU 747.12, and AU 768.4. We can dismiss the last of these, as, in a later passage, the holy woman Samthann refers to the person she is contacting as her favourite cleric from among the 'Descert', the south of Ireland; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §61. The first candidate might be dismissed as a secular individual, as he is identified only by his father, and is not connected to any religious establishment. This leaves only two possibilities, which cannot be further narrowed from the scant evidence offered in the text. Gwynn and Purton, however, were in no doubt that the individual in question was Fer Dá Crích of Dar-Inis, providing evidence from the Martyrology of Donegal, which states that Fer Dá Crích was the teacher of Máel Ruain; see Gwynn and Purton, p. 168.
[813] Mac Oíged, abbot of Lismore, died in 753; see AU 753.2
[814] Samthann of Cluain Brónaig died in 739: see AU 739.3.
[815] O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé*, p. 4. Dublitir, an anchorite of Findglas, is recorded to have died in 796; AU 796.1.
[816] Arguing for lay laxity, for example, are O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé*, pp. 15-16; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 173-176; and Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 470-471. The contrary view is express by Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 3-8; Lambkin, 'Blathmac and the Céili Dé', pp. 150-152; and Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church', pp. 19-22.
[817] Fifteen texts are attributed to the *céli Dé* in Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 471-477, and pp. 479-482. Substantially more, including poetry, are noted in O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé*, pp.122-191. Follett offers a detailed study of the various texts assigned to the movement, arguing that only seven can be ascribed with any certainty (including *The Monastery of Tallaght*) to the *céli Dé* of the eighth and ninth centuries, with three more being possible productions of that period; Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 100-170, and pp. 220-224.
[818] Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 212-215. For a detailed analysis of the term and its implications, see Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church', pp. 22-40. The term *céli Dé* is used only twice in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §40 and §45. While it is not clear to whom the text is referring, whether a specific group with the monastery or a broader organisation, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that a text designed to

may also have included, aside from *muintir* '(regular) monks',[819] *caillecha* 'nuns',[820] *aes aithrige* or *aes pende* 'penitent folk',[821] *deissi* 'tenantry',[822] *aes tuaithe* 'laity',[823] or *mec bethad* 'sons of life'.[824] He also points out that monastery of Tallaght, and several other establishments associated with the *céli Dé*, hold far more in common with the 'traditional' notion of an Irish monastery, and argues that, far from being a reform movement, it was, though distinctive, within the paradigm of Irish monasticism.[825] Pointing out that Máel Ruain is nowhere referred to as a member of the *céli Dé*, but is designated in his obit as a 'soldier of Christ', Haggart concludes that the two terms are broadly equivalent,[826] which would suggest that, rather being a movement, *céli Dé* was a title bestowed on those held in high esteem. Haggart concludes that the formal movement know as the *céli Dé* did not come in to effect until the tenth century, casting the *céli Dé* of the eighth and ninth centuries, and consequently the individuals named in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, as an amorphous group characterised by particular devotion living within established communities.[827] This ties in neatly with Lambkin's view of the *céli Dé* being ascetics and holy men regarded as saints or, in essence, spiritual aristocrats, whose practices in some fashion vexed the traditional Church, which they considered to be lax in comparison to their own strict practices.[828] At the time of Máel Ruain and Máel Díthraib, it would appear that the *céli Dé*, rather than being a coherent and organised reform movement, were small group of individuals of particularly rigorous devotion who considered themselves (and who were considered by the community of Tallaght and other establishments) to be the Christian elect, direct clients of God. It may well

---

promote an ascetic movement would seize every opportunity to extol its virtues, and not simply limit it to proscriptions against drinking after urination or activity after evensong on Sunday.

[819] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §6, §18, and §36.

[820] *Ibid*., §62.

[821] *Ibid*., §11 and §73.

[822] *Ibid*., §71.

[823] *Ibid*., §14, §21, §35, §65, §66, §71, and §87.

[824] *Ibid*., §1, §25, §39, and §61. This last instance implies that there were a number of these 'sons of life' operating in Munster during the lifetime of Samthann. This term is used more often in this text than *céli Dé*, which may serve as an indication of their relative importance to the author, though it may in fact be that these appellations are synonymous, much as *aes aithrige* and *aes pende* are, which would dilute somewhat the idea that the *céli Dé* were a separate and identifiable movement, while adding weight to the argument that they were merely a category of especially spiritual individuals within a monastery. Considering the perfective idea behind the *céli Dé*, the term *aes fuirbti* 'finished/perfect folk' may also hold some of the same meaning; *ibid*., §23. It is also worth noting that the Old Irish Table of Commutations, attributed to the *céli Dé*, also holds a reference to 'sons of life'; 'The Old-Irish Table of Commutations', §31. Furthermore, the *Apgithir Chrábaid*, a text associated with (but not necessarily a product of) the *céli Dé*, contrasts 'sons of life' with 'sons of death'; see Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 140-142, and Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 312-313.

[825] Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 212-215.

[826] Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church', pp. 43-44. This would refute O'Dwyer's claim that Máel Ruain was one of the leaders of the reform; O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé*, p. 30.

[827] Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church', pp. 61-62.

[828] Lambkin,'Blathmac and the *Céili Dé*', pp. 150-152.

have been that Máel Ruain and a number of other individuals considered themselves *céli Dé*, but they were not the founders of, or participants in, the organised reform movement known as the *Céli Dé*.

6.2 The Tallaght Memoir

The anonymous *Monastery of Tallaght*, *Teaching of Máel Ruain*, and *Rule of the Céli Dé* offer a unique insight in early Irish monastic and religious lay life as they describe many features of the daily routine of a monastery and what was demanded of the common people, such as the preferred hymns and when they are to be performed,[829] rigours of punishment,[830] dietary disciplines,[831] and many of the more mundane aspects of such an existence which are not found in hagiographical or penitential materials. Where these three works correspond it might plausibly be assumed that they reliably point to passages copied from the original *sein-leabhar*, and, as such, the fact that §§1-37 (§17 and §18 omitted) and §§75-76 of *The Monastery of Tallaght* correlates quite closely to roughly one third of *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* would imply that this section of the older text, at the very least, is trustworthy.[832] Since the latter text is incomplete, we can only assume that it would have continued to reiterate its older companion, as there is no reason to doubt the authenticity or continuity of *The Monastery of Tallaght*. It has been suggested that *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* is a later paraphrase of *The Monastery of Tallaght*, with additions from other sources.[833] *The Rule of the Céli Dé* appears to be a composite text, and, where it does copy passages from the other two texts (or the original source), they have been stripped of specific place- and personal-

[829] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §5, §8, §28, and §§30-32; these passages correlate to *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §11, §29, §32, §§36-37, §42, §86, §96, and §§99-102, and *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, §§22-23.
[830] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §6, §11, §14, §20, §26, §37, §41, §43, §66, §73, §84, and §86; similar passages are found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §§39-40, §51, §63, §69, §82, and §106, and *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, §§51-52, and §34.
[831] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §7, §9, §12-13, §40, §42, §§52-53, §63, §68, §77, §80, §86, and §89; some of these correspond to *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §41, §48, §§60-62, and *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, §41. It would seem that diet was of unusual concern to the founder of Tallaght and his disciple.
[832] It is interesting that *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §§17-18 are not found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*; if the correlation had been maintained, we would expect to find these passages in the latter text at §§66-67, yet what is recorded here is from much later in the former text, corresponding to *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §§75-76. Which is the correct sequence; have these passages been inserted into *The Monastery of Tallaght*, or omitted from *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*? Neither text follows a narrative or logical form, so it may be impossible to deduce the answer. Furthermore, since *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* is incomplete, we cannot know if these passages were not omitted but simply appeared elsewhere in the text.
[833] Gwynn, *The Rule of Tallaght*, pp. xi-xiii.

names.[834] While we must be cautious in using these later texts, and in ascribing the practices that they describe to the period during which Máel Ruain was active, their frequent concordance with the earliest survivor lends weight to the argument that they do indeed preserve the customs of early medieval Tallaght. *The Monastery of Tallaght* provides us with numerous episodes concerning a large number of identifiable individuals from across the Irish world contemporary to either Máel Ruain or Máel Díthraib, which suggests a vibrant and active interaction between Irish monastic centres. While we might at first be sceptical of such associations, suspecting perhaps that the writer may have inserted illustrious figures to enhance the prestige of his own foundation, this would be at odds with the relatively perfunctory nature of the text, and the fact that he was writing of contemporaneous individuals. *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* follows a similar style, while, as has been noted previously, the *Rule of the Céli Dé* has been stripped down, becoming a paraphrase of the earlier texts. These documents also hold several interesting references to penance and bloodshed which, given their more practical approach when compared to hagiography or the Penitentials, provide a rare insight into the practicalities of the practice.

6.3 Penance at the Monastery of Tallaght

The Monastery of Tallaght appears to be highly concerned with the appropriate authority for, and the correct process of, confession; that is to say, who can hear confession and under what circumstances. In the second passage of the work we are informed that if a penitent is not performing his duties he is to be sent away from confession gently and calmly, and if he does not repent, he is to be dismissed completely.[835] This matter of *anmchairdine*, 'spiritual direction',[836] is taken up again later in the document when we are informed that some think it

[834] *Ibid*., pp. xiii-xv. Compare *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §22, and *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §72 which refer to the relaxation of vigils on a feast day, using the example of the feast of Cainnech at Tallaght; the references to the saint and the location are removed in *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, §27.

[835] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §2. One wonders if the stipulation to dismiss the confessing individual gently and calmly implies that confessors were in the habit of being more heated and abrupt with them. It should be noted that there is some difficulty in translating this passage as some of the words are unknown. Furthermore, as Gwynn and Purton note, *áosa coimsi*, which is translated as 'persons in authority' (lit., 'suitable folk'), may be a textual error and could be read as *áes cuibse*, 'confessing folk', giving the passage in a rather different tone; see Gwynn and Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', p. 165. The sentiment of this passage is echoed in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §37, which states that it is proper to refuse the confession of one who does not perform penance.

[836] This term is translated inconsistently by Gwynn and Purton. It translates literally as 'soul-friend', and when used as a noun, *anmchara*, to describe an individual, they translate it as 'confessor', but as a verb they prefer

sufficient to make their confession but not complete their penance, which is, understandably, not the approved method.[837] We are given the examples of Helair (Hilary) and Máel Ruain: the former eventually ceased hearing confessions from any except the most holy as the penances he prescribed were not being performed and sins were concealed, and the latter was quite strict in terms of who he would receive.[838] It is also stated that it is preferable to refuse to receive the confession of one who would not complete their penance, but the would-be confessor must still do all that is in his power to do the sinner good.[839] If sins are confessed, *lanpendait*, 'full penance', must be imposed, which, if left uncompleted, is itself punished by banishment.[840] It would appear that any member of the Christian community, lay and religious, could submit to confession, but that some were disappointingly negligent in the completion of their punishment, and indeed in their honesty. An individual was to consult their confessor at least once a year, but the more frequent the better.[841] As a caveat to this, *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* makes it clear that Máel Ruain did not see any merit in regular confession that was the result of regular sin unaccompanied by penance.[842] A penitent was to make a firm resolution to do no sin, without thought for his wife, any children that they might have, or for wealth.[843] This does not necessarily imply that penitents were compelled to abandon the world and join a monastery, but rather may have served as an encouragement to remain as true to their sentence as possible and not fall to material temptations. According to the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, there were only four crimes which could not be atoned for by penance, one of which was divulging a confession, an indication of how seriously the

'spiritual direction', rather than 'confession'. This may be to avoid confusion with *cubus*/*cobias* 'crime/confession' (which are themselves often confused in the text). It may be better to consistently use 'spiritual director/direction' or 'soul-friend/friendship' so as to recognise the greater depth and effort demanded for the medieval practice when compared to its modern counterpart.

[837] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §23. This is admonishment is also found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §74, and in *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §28. These latter two texts make it explicit that the confessor is liable for incomplete penance.

[838] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §§23-24, and *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §§75-76. The death of Elarius (Helair/Hilary), anchorite and *scriba* of Loch Cré, is noted in AU 807.5. He was approached earlier in the text for advice by Máel Díthraib concerning church produce, and he was consulted by Máel Ruain in reference to the correct practice of the recital of psalms, *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §§4-5, and *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §§35-36. It is worth noting that, in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, the only people Helair hears the confession of are the *áos fuirbti* 'finished/perfect folk'; in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* we are told that he would not hear any confession, but encouraged penitents to seek the advice of the *aes fhoirbhthi*. Though the key elements remain, there is a subtle change in the role of Helair in this episode, from a confessor of the 'perfect' to some kind of intractable holyman who dismissed even the worthy. To add to the confusion, *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* then informs us that Helair would not hear the confessions of those whom he suspected as already having spiritual directors, which would imply that he was hearing some confessions at least.

[839] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §54.

[840] *Ibid*.

[841] *Ibid*., §44.

[842] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §22. A paraphrase of this passage is found in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §18.

[843] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §57. It should be noted that this passage is incomplete, and so we do not posses 'his' (presumably Máel Ruain) full thoughts on the matter.

covenant was taken.[844] As an interesting counterpoint to *The Monastery of Tallaght*, it would appear that the Máel Ruain of *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* was not so strict concerning incomplete penance, as we are told that it is better for a man to make a confession, and do part of his penance, even if he cannot complete it, than not to make any confession at all, such that he does no bear the burden of unconfessed sins at death.[845] We are also told that confessors should not accept gifts *ó thuatib*, 'from the laity', who think that such donations are sufficient for securing the remission of their sins.[846] A confessor must refuse such offerings, unless they come from one who has truly submitted to spiritual direction or is holy.[847] We may see in *The Monastery of Tallaght* evidence of certain level of (perceived) religious laxity among the early medieval Irish, a transactional penitential system which simply relieves sin through payment, rather than the correct striving for personal improvement. In addition to this, *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, in its condemnation of the practice of frequent confession as a remedy for equally frequent sinning, indicates that such practices did occur. In contrast to this, we are told that some individuals lie about their sins, not in an effort to escape punishment, but to increase it.[848] It would appear, then, that the penitent were both lax and over-zealous in their penance, an illustration of the fact that the laity were not one unified group, a coherent Christian community, but individuals who encompassed a spectrum of religious observance.

Máel Ruain only accepts Máel Díthraib, who had been under the *anmchairdini* of Echtguide,[849] after he had been given permission to leave his former confessor, and had undergone a year of *aithglantae* 'repurification'.[850] This requirement for authorisation is reinforced later in the 'historical' tale of a certain monk who succumbed to lust and had a

[844] *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §38. The other unpardonable crimes were: lying with a dead person, transgressing with a kinswoman, and falling into sin while holding higher orders.
[845] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §17.
[846] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §35. This is echoed in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §105, which goes so far as to say that laymen believed that giving a gift to their confessor would secure passage into Heaven, and that the confessor would then be at their command.
[847] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §35.
[848] *Ibid*., §64.
[849] Échtgus died in 827 as *princeps* of Tallaght: AU 827.1. Presumably he was a successor to Máel Ruain.
[850] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §24. *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §§76-77 also relates this tale, but offers some detail as to what was required during the year of purification, which was three periods of forty days on bread and water (with minor exemptions for Sundays and summer-Lent). We are also told that Máel Ruain advised Máel Díthraib that he should 'seek out the fire that you think will burn you the fiercest', 'an teine as geire mheasfas tú dod losgadh ionnsaigh i'; *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §77. This would seem to equate confession and penance with the fires of purgation. The *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §29 reduces this episode to the essential point that one can seek out another confessor if given leave by the original. The message of this passage is repeated later, where it is stated that one can change one soul-friend for another if the penance of the first is completed; see *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §37.

tryst with a woman.[851] He confesses his sin to Findo mac Fiatach,[852] who decides that the encounter was contrived by a demon, and so the monk was not at fault and need not suffer penance. Satan convinces him, however, that he is still in peril, and must seek out the counsel of Comgell,[853] who offers the same advice as Findo. Leaving Bangor, the monk is once again encouraged by Satan to confess his sins, doing so when he meets Columba at the harbour where the holy man's currach lands.[854] The founder of Iona chastises the monk harshly, stating that he has sinned not once, but four times: the sexual encounter itself, his disbelief in the pronouncements of Findo and Comgell, and in seeking out Columba himself. He imposes fifteen years of penance on the monk for his contempt of Findo. In not accepting the judgement of his confessor, and in seeking out the advice of others without permission, the monk committed a grave crime, and suffered far more harshly than if had accepted the initial decision. Later again, the text states that a confessor must be diligent in extracting every misdeed from an individual, even if it interrupts meals, for the sake of healing them, and for their own.[855] This would seem to suggest that the confessor would suffer for being negligent in drawing out all the crimes of the sinner, which may have played a part in the reluctance of Máel Ruain and Helair to hear the sins of others; an incomplete confession, or penance, may have put confessor himself in some kind of spiritual danger.[856] The structure of confession was then that a confessor must draw out all the crimes of an individual, and was to some degree morally responsible for the completeness of this task, and the individual had to accept the authority of their confessor unless they had been given express permission to seek another. In *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* we are informed that, once the penance for a sin prescribed by a confessor has been completed, it is not necessary to confess this sin to a new confessor; only new sins, or sins for which the penance remains incomplete, need be admitted to one's new spiritual director.[857] The implication here is that, once penance has been undergone for a specific sin, the stain of that deed has been expunged.

[851] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §66.
[852] As noted previously, Finnian of Mag mBili, descendant of Fiatach, died in 579; see n. 177 above. This provides us with the latest possible date at which this tale may have occurred. Note that this is (plausibly) the same Finnian of the Penitential.
[853] Comgall, the founder of Bangor, died in 602: AU 602.1.
[854] Columba, founder of Iona, died in 595: AU 595.2
[855] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §78.
[856] This is also hinted at in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §64. In Cummian's Penitential, the very last section suggests that a confessor is granted some element of reward and glory for the merit of the penance undertaken by, and salvation of, an individual; *Paen. Cumm.*, *epilogus* §5. The logical implication of this is that the confessor is also liable for the failure of the individual, which we see here in the *Monastery of Tallaght*.
[857] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §21. This passage is repeated in brief in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §17.

An aspect, perhaps, of the continuous demand to draw out the misdeeds of an individual may have been the imposition of immediate punishment when a crime was witnessed, not necessarily waiting for the sacrament of confession itself. Dublitir chastises an old woman who had sought his permission to sleep in the *les caillech*, 'nuns' hostel', at Findglas.[858] His confessor, Caínchomrac, bishop of the Deisi at Findglas, was present at that time and rebuked Dublitir, stating that the woman should be allowed to enter the hostel, and be given a milch cow and a cloak.[859] The bishop also says that he will settle the anchorite's penance there and then. Presumably Dublitir, as an anchorite, has no property of his own, so we might wonder who is donating the cow and the cloak to the woman. If Dublitir is indeed making this award himself, why then does he also have to suffer penance? It may be that material restitution is being made to the woman for the physical action of his misdeed, but that spiritual compensation to God is also necessary. The crime is not simply just against the woman, but an affront to God, and so Dublitir's restoration requires both terrestrial and heavenly reparations. In any event, it is clear that correction can occur at any point.

The Monastery of Tallght explicitly states that the *áos aithrigi*, 'folk of penance', submitted to spiritual direction and undertook a weekly purification.[860] It is also noted that the laity are among the inmates of a penitentiary (*teg pende*, 'house of penance') in an episode where a demon drives a monk to lust, elements of which have been discussed previously.[861] We are given no details as to the purpose, or the inmates, of the house. It is interesting to note that it would seem to be demeaning for a monk to join the penitents in their

[858] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §7. Presumably the nun's hostel was at Findglas, since this is where both the anchorite and the bishop hailed from. Dublitir is recorded as having been the leader of the anchorites and *scribae* at an assembly of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen at the *oppidum* of Tara in 780, an indication of his very high authority; see AU 780.12. This episode is also found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §41, with some minor alterations; the woman is referred to as a *bean bocht*, a poor woman, and she is to be allowed live with the nuns or given a milch cow and cloak, not both. In *The Monastery of Tallaght* the crime would appear to be that Dublitir illegally denied the woman her due, while in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* his crime was of insufficient charity. *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §20 also stresses the importance for venial sins and minor offences to be confessed immediately. This is repeated in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §16.

[859] Caínchomrac, bishop of Findglas died in 791; AU 791.1.

[860] '...áos tuatha arfaom anmcairdini', *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §14. This passage is echoed in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §63, where we are informed that the laity who sought spiritual direction were ordered to stay apart from their wives on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights, and, preferably, on Sunday nights, and during their wives' monthly periods also. There is also a specific instance where an *alaili túati*, 'a certain countryman/layman', seeks out Mocholmoc for *anmchardi*, 'spiritual direction'; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §21. The analogous passage in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §71, conveys almost exactly the same event. This might also be considered a contemporary account as Colmán (Mocholmoc), descendant of Littán, died in 731; AU 731.8. Colmán (note that Mo- is a common prefix to Irish names) is noted in this entry as being a *religionis doctor*, a teacher of the spiritual life, which fits neatly with the image of him described in *The Monastery of Tallaght*.

[861] '...dotfastad eiter tuaid $_7$ ditbreith a teg pendi...', '...to detain you among the laity and bring you into a house of penance...', *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §66.

house, suggesting that they may be of a lower spiritual rank. It may also point to the possibility of the enforcement of a spiritual segregation of sorts to avoid the corruption of those who have taken vows by those who have not. It is also stated that Máel Ruain travelled significant distances on Sundays to minister to the *dessi… ⁊ tuathibh biti fo anmchairtes*, 'tenants… and laity who are under spiritual direction'.[862] This would seem to suggest that the penitent were not simply the lay tenants of ecclesiastical lands, but part of a broader Christian community beyond the immediate boundaries of a church. We might imagine that a cleric, acting as a spiritual director, could strike out into the countryside and attend to the laity, hearing their confessions and imposing penances as he saw fit. It may have been that penance for minor offences could be undertaken at home, and that the *teg pende* was reserved for those who had committed grave crimes (recall the monk who had succumbed to lust, a crime punished by seven years' penance).[863] The *teg pende* was, perhaps, specifically designated for the laity alone as, while they may have been expected to endure a certain level of hardship for their sins that may have been comparable to that endured by monks, they were undergoing penance for the purgation of their sins. This may have served to keep those undertaking perfective penance, the monks and the clergy who were holy and pure, separate from those who might spiritually 'contaminate' them.[864]

The Teaching of Máel Ruain offers some insight into penitential discipline: on Sundays, those undergoing *dúr pennuide*, 'rigid penance', were allowed a sip of milk, which might imply that all other penitents were allowed milk in general.[865] During the Sundays of spring and winter Lents, a *selann* at night was allowed to any except those suffering rigid

[862] *Ibid*., §71.
[863] *Ibid*., §11. *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §51 matches this passage, adding individuals who commit carnal sins in sacred buildings or consecrated churches to those who must undergo seven years *dúir-pheannaide*, 'hard penance'. In the case of this carnal sin, it would seem that if one party had not consented to the act they did not have to undergo penance for it, a recognition, perhaps, of the increasing violence and disregard for the sanctuary of churches during the Viking period, or of the recognition of intent being an important factor in sinful acts.
[864] At several points the reader is warned against accepting gifts from the laity until the items had been purified; see *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §35, §57, and §67. The very last passage of the text warns against mixing good with evil; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §90. No mention is made of the purification of gifts in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §30 and §105 [= *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §35], though it is stated that one should be reluctant to accept gifts from the laity, and that, if accepted, the gifts should in turn be given to the poor, but, ultimately, those who wish to remain *foirbthe*, 'perfect', should refuse such offerings. There may be a connection between the *teg pende* and those who must undertake the category of *dúrpendid*, 'hard penance', referred to in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §11.
[865] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §1. In the *Rule of the Céli Dé* we find almost exactly the same recommendations, except the portion concerning the allowance of milk on the Sundays of spring and winter is omitted, and the curious addition of penitents not being allowed butter except on Saint Patrick's Day, with an extra ration of milk if the feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday, and a *selann* if on a Sunday; *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §3.

penance,[866] which may be a suggestion that this is also a concession of some kind for general penitents. A rather elaborate sequence for receiving communion, which may be a process of ritual purification, by penitents (or possibly the laity in general) is given in detail: over a period of nine years, an individual moves from being allowed to receive the bread only once a year to receiving it on various holy festivals, then on regular forty-day intervals, and then, finally, each Sunday.[867] This nine year purification is longer than the penance for grievous crimes (for example, seven years for murder), and it is not clear if it is in addition to any penitential duration, or contingent on its completion. It seems more likely that penance for general sins and this ritual of purification were have been concurrent (if the penitent individual chose to undertake both), as any new sin committed during the process would have forced the communicant to begin the nine year procedure again, and it would be highly unlikely that over the course of nine years an individual would not commit some misdeed. More serious sins appear to have merited their own special stipulations, which will be discussed presently.

The monks of Tallaght sang in private and paid the debts of sinners.[868] It is not clear, however, if these sinners are the monks themselves and the debts their own. Perhaps the monks were, in some fashion, paid to sing on behalf of others, but, considering that they were singing psalms in private, it may be the case that they were undertaking some kind of penitential act. If this is what is being described, it would be intriguing evidence for the practice of private penance among monks at Tallaght. Following this, if the inmates of the *teg pende* were in some fashion expected to behave as monks, they may also have sung psalms in an act of private penance. It is also noted in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* that the penitents of Tallaght used to perform a vigil at lauds, and again at nones, from Ascension to Pentecost, implying that this was no longer the case at the time of writing.[869] This was, presumably, a

[866] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §1.
[867] *Ibid*., §§4-5. §4 makes no explicit reference to who this complex system applies to, but, as §5 appears to be offering exceptions to its predecessor on grounds of committing bloodshed and other serious sins, it seems reasonable to suggest that penitents or layfolk are the people being discussed. The specifics of the system are as follows: after a year an individual is allowed to receive only the bread of communion at midnight mass on Easter, and again the following Easter midnight; in the third year, the bread is received on Easter and Christmas, with the fourth year adding Epiphany, little Easter (presumably this is Low Sunday), and Pentecost; in the fifth year an individual is allowed the bread every forty days and during the previously noted periods; in the sixth year bread is received at the end of each month, increasing to every other Sunday in the seventh and eighth year; in the ninth year communion is given every Sunday. We find this system repeated in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §13, except that at the end of the seventh year the bread is given every Sunday.
[868] 'Secreto canebant et soluebant debita peccatorum', *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §18. It should be noted that Gwynn translates *secreto* as 'secret'. One wonders how secret the singing of psalms would be; perhaps 'They sang in private...' may be a more likely translation.
[869] *Ibid*., §26.

practice put in place by Máel Ruain when he founded Tallaght, but when, why, and under whose authority this custom was changed remains unsaid. It is also unclear if this vigil was undertaken by penitents alone, who were released from this duty at some later point, as a penitential act, or if they performed this vigil along with the monks of the monastery, who continued with the practice. Perhaps lay participation was terminated as vigils were considered liturgical rather than penitential in nature by Máel Ruain's successors. The monks and penitents of Tallaght recited the *Beati* (Psalm 118) and the *Magnificat* twelve times instead of one hundred and fifty psalms, as more of them knew the *Beati*,[870] offering evidence to the point that monks and penitents undertook similar rites and practices, though not explicitly in each other's company. Furthermore, considering the fact that a canticle and psalm were repeated twelve times, rather than the recitation of a large number of unique psalms, this passage may indicate that the penitents were not expected to learn a broad variety of prayers, or that they were not well versed in the Bible, hinting that, rather than being permanent inmates of the monastery, they were visitors with only a limited knowledge of the rites and practices of penance.

The Teaching of Máel Ruain offers some hint as to what penitential practice at Tallaght may have entailed, but only for those who had committed grave crimes and submitted to seven years of penance, which is fortuitous as many of the sins of bloodshed fall within this category. We are told that 'he' does not remember the specifics of the penitential punishments for the various sins, but that seven-year penitents had to spend three forty-day periods on bread and water, with no milk or whey mixed in, and for the entire duration of their sentence they were barred from consuming bacon, butter, and flesh, though they were permitted oatmeal porridge on the great festivals and Sundays.[871] It would also appear that seven-year penitents were not exempt from vigils, except for one evening on each night of the

[870] *Ibid*., §37. It is not explicitly stated that this was a practice of Tallaght, only that it was taught to Muirchertach mac Olcobhair, *airchinnech* of Clonfert (recorded in that annals as being the abbot of *Cluana Ferta Brénainn*, and having died in 802, making him an exact contemporary of Máel Ruain; AU 802.5), by a *mac beathadh*, 'son of life'. We are told nothing of this anonymous 'son of life', so the presumption of his affiliation with Tallaght may be tenuous, except for the fact that the very first episode in *The Monastery of Tallaght* relates a discussion between an *athlaoch*, 'ex-layman', and *meic bethad* concerning the very same issue; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §1. The former asks the latter why he is continuously singing the *Beati* and the Canticle of Mary (*i.e.*, the *Magificat*), leading us to assume that both individuals are, in some fashion, attached to Tallaght, and that one, the ex-layman, having joined the establishment, is being taught by a revered resident.

[871] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §52. Who this 'he' is left to the reader to guess; one might imagine that Máel Ruain would not forget the penitential practices that he enforced at his own establishment, so it seems reasonable to assume that this is Máel Díthraib trying to recall what was practised at Tallaght for the anonymous author.

eight festivals.[872] They would also perform no more than two hundred prostrations each day, unless undertaking a task, saying one hundred and fifty psalms at the same time.[873] This offers an interesting counterpoint to the previously noted passage which stated that, as the many of the monks and penitents were not sufficiently familiar with the psalms, they recited the *Beati* and the *Magnificat* instead;[874] perhaps this indicates a shift in policy between the recording of these sections, or that it was understood that the recitation of psalms was interchangeable with the *Beati* and *Magnificat*. In any event, it would appear that these prostrations could have been carried out before the congregation or as a matter of discipline, which may suggest the option to undergo one's penance in private. It is also noted that one who could not read was given manual labour instead,[875] which may be further evidence that these acts were considered a punishment, and that (illiterate) layfolk constituted, at the very least, a noteworthy portion of the individuals undertaking them. This category of penitents was only admitted to communion at midnight mass (presumably at Easter) after three and a half years, and if their penitence was deemed to be true, they were allowed to attend midnight mass for the remainder of their term.[876] We might assume that this marked their first step on the ritual of purification mentioned previously, offering the curious situation where by it was only after completing half of their term that they are considered sufficiently 'clean' to begin the process, or perhaps it was a matter of illustrating their dedication to their own reform. The latter seems more likely, as the opportunity to receive communion after three and a half years was dependent on the individual's outward and inward disposition; if they were not considered to be satisfactorily penitent they would not be admitted to communion until the end of their seven year term.[877]

Máel Ruain, it would seem, was reluctant to take the old and infirm under his spiritual direction due to the difficulties in assisting them in their penance; they may have been unable

[872] *Ibid*., §53. It should be noted that the copyist seems to believe that this passage refers to monks, but, considering that it lies between a series of passages discussing seven-year penitents specifically (§51, §52, and §54), I would argue that it follows in the same vein. The eight festivals presumably included Easter, Little Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, and Pentecost (following the system laid out in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §4, see n. 867; the remaining three feasts may have been Ascension, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday. It is interesting to note that the *Rule of the Céli Dé* conflates the final element of *The Teachings of Máel Ruain*, §52 (on porridge) and the beginning of §53 (on festivals); see the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §24. It would appear that whoever constructed the *Rule of the Céli Dé* was also puzzled by the ambiguity of the eight festivals, making explicit that the relaxation was allowed on every principal festival between Easter and Pentecost, and on the Tuesday and Thursday between Christmas and Epiphany.
[873] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §53.
[874] See above, n. 870.
[875] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §53.
[876] *Ibid*., §54.
[877] *Ibid*.

to perform vigils or labour, and their food could not be reduced without risking their already failing health.[878] They were deemed too arduous to cure unless they were contrite and penitent in their hearts. The poor were also considered to be flawed penitents, as they were accustomed to going hungry, and so fasting would have little impact on them; manual labour and religious work was considered the solution to this hurdle.[879] This would imply that the majority of the penitents of Tallaght, whether they were inmates or visitors, must have been able-bodied men, physically capable of undergoing the rigours of penance. In view of Máel Ruain's particular interest in the situation of poor penitents, they must have been of sufficient number to merit particular consideration, and the fact that they were specifically put to work may imply that normal penitents were not (or at least not to the same degree).

In *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* we find a passage which relates then penance for a man who failed to attend Sunday mass: he had to recite the 'three fifties' while standing with his eyes shut in a *ttigh druite*, a 'closed/shut house'.[880] This structure was, presumably, a *teg pende* as it would seem unlikely that any house would suffice for this penitential act. The brevity of this deed of restitution in a *teg pende* suggests that the inmates of Tallaght's penitentiary consisted of both long- and short-term penitents, or that this penance was designed to shame the individual into regularly attending mass by placing them among the long-term inmates of the penitentiary.

Unlike the other two texts under discussion, the *Rule of the Céli Dé* provides us with some hints as to what was expected of the clergy in terms of penance and confession. It is stated that it is the duty of anyone in orders who is in charge of a church to hear the confessions of the tenants of that church, male or female, and that if these dependants do not accept *maam n-anmcharut*, 'the yoke of confession', they are denied communion, intercessory prayer, and burial in God's church.[881] This does not necessarily suggest that confession was limited to the tenants of a given church, but that there was a special obligation between the confessor and the lay tenant: the former was duty-bound to hear the confession of the latter, who must in turn submit fully to the judgement in return for receiving the sacraments. Elsewhere in the text, it is noted that churchmen are not entitled to the dues owed to their establishment if they fail to provide, among other things, baptism, communion, and

[878] *Ibid.*, §58.
[879] 'Peannaid shaothair ₇ oibre do mholadh se', 'he recommends penance of [manual] labour and [religious] work', *ibid*.
[880] *Ibid.*, §85.
[881] *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §64.

intercessory prayer for their *manach* [sic], 'tenants', and, notably, the same is said of priests of the *mhi[n]-eclasib tuaithe*, 'minor churches of the laity'.[882] This makes a clear provision for lay-folk who were not tenants of the Church, implying that there existed certain churches that ministered to the pastoral needs of the general laity, perhaps 'private' centres which were established by a local lord for his people. Since such rites as baptism and communion were offered, hearing confession and the provision of penance may also have been available. Each 'chief state' had to have a 'chief bishop' who alone could hear the confessions of lords, monastic superiors, and priests in orders.[883] Bishops had to be especially careful in whom they chose to confer higher orders upon: since the duties of the latter included hearing confession and knowing the appropriate remedies for every sin, the conferring bishop was himself culpable for any individual who was not able to exercise such rites correctly or completely.[884] Such a failure demanded six years of penance, and seven *cumal*s of gold, which would imply that such failures had become common, necessitating harsh penalties to root out bad practices, or were perceived to be so great a violation of a bishop's sacred duties as to demand severe punishment.

The author of *The Monastery of Tallaght* informs us that, usually, anger or wrath must be reported by the offender to the target, pardon must be sought, and fasting undertaken.[885] However, if the target is one of the offender's monks, servants, or attendants, the crime need not be revealed for fear that the underling might become more careless.[886] The text argues that an individual in authority must command the awe and fear of those beneath him, and so for him to do penance before them would be negligent; a hundred blows to the hand with a scourge is the punishment required, and if this does not eliminate the anger, the offender must impose a private fast on himself.[887] This passage would seem to suggest that this text is not for common consumption by the Christian community, or even perhaps by monks, but rather

[882] *Ibid*., §57 and §58.
[883] '...i timna Patraic, co raibe prim-espoc cecha prim-tuathi i nErinn... fri hanmchairdine do flaithib $_7$ oirchinnib $_7$ d'oes graid...', '...by the commandment of Patrick, that there be a chief bishop to every chief state in Ireland... for receiving confessions from kings and *erenagh*s and priests in orders...', *ibid*., §60. Note that Gwynn translates *flaithib* as 'kings', but it is more precisely 'lords' or 'rulers'. A 'chief-bishop' of a 'chief-state' is not necessarily an archbishop, but rather a regular bishop who had jurisdiction over more than one *túath*, possibly equivalent to a *rí túatha* (a king of many *túath*s), where a (non-chief) bishop is akin to a *rí túaithe* (a king of a single *túath*); see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 143-144.
[884] *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §59.
[885] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §36. Both this and the following passage are dovetailed together into one in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §106 (which ends abruptly), and in *The Rule of the Céli Dé*, §34.
[886] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §37. This stipulation against admitting fault to an underling may also be indicative of the 'aristocratic' nature of the *céli Dé*; it would be unbecoming of a lord to admit fault to a servant.
[887] *Ibid*.

only for more senior members of the establishment, figures of authority who could not be seen submitting to common acts of penance.[888]

Bloodshed is referred to only twice in *The Monastery of Tallaght*. In the first instance it is simply stated that the penalty for those who shed blood and commit murder is seven years *dúrpendid*, 'hard/strict penance'.[889] The only penitential text which maps on to this exactly is the Old-Irish Penitential, which imposes seven years penance for all non-kin related homicides.[890] The Penitential of Finnian, the ultimate inspiration for all Irish penitentials, demands seven years penance (and ten in exile) of a cleric who commits murder, but only three of a layman.[891] These texts demonstrate the radical shift that had occurred between the time of Finnnian and Máel Ruain: the laity which constituted the *áos aithrigi*, 'penitent folk', now suffered the penance of clerics where before 'they were of the world'. That said, it must be questioned if the laity did constitute an element of the *áos aithrigi*: while this passage does not specify who these penitents are, only that some are given to lust and may have numerous children by various mates, and others are guilty of bloodshed and murder, the reader must either assume that this refers to a lay lifestyle, or posit that there was a sufficiently large group of highly ill-disciplined clerics, monks, and 'para-monstics' to necessitate the specific designation of such an assembly. Almost as if to resolve this quandary, later in the text we are specifically informed that a cleric who kills a captive is to suffer penance like any other *dunoircnid*, 'man-slayer'.[892] This would suggest that, at the very least, the *áos aithrigi* did not necessarily contain clergy. In this second passage, the diet imposed on a killer is described: they, like any who have committed a grave crime deserving seven or more years' penance, receive only *menadach is uscu*, 'gruel under water'.[893]

---

[888] Another passage outlines the remedy imposed upon those whose desires are excited through, among other things, hearing confession: *ibid*., §59. This may be further evidence that the text was aimed at the higher ranks, rather than common monks or lower clergy.

[889] *Ibid*., §11. In this passage penitents are referred to as *áos aithrigi*, 'penitent folk'; *dúrpendid*, 'hard penance' may be a particular category of penance reserved for grave crimes. We find the same terms of punishment in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §51 for those who shed blood and kill people, seven years *dúir-pheannaide*, except this rigorous penance is extended to those who commit carnal sins also, as noted above, n. 863.

[890] OI Pen., V §2. It should be noted, however, that neither reference is verbally related to the other; compare 'dano doeismet fuili ₇ marbthai duine .uii. mbliadna doib in dúrpendid', *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §11, and '.uii. bliadna penne cacha duinoircni olchena', OI Pen., V §2. The latter refers to the more general 'marbthai duine', '[one who] kills a man', while the latter uses a specific term, 'duinoircni', 'man-slaying'. Seven or ten years' penance for homicide is imposed by *Canones Hibernenses*, I §§2-3. The Bigotian notes that Theodore demanded a penitential term of seven or ten years for the murder of another in a vengeance killing; *Paen. Bi.*, IV §1.2. This, in turn, was carried forward into the Old Irish Penitential, and thence, presumably, into *The Monastery of Tallaght*.

[891] *Pen. Vinn.*, §23 and §35.

[892] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §84.

[893] *Ibid*.

Near the end of the text is a very interesting episode which relates the consequences of the unfortunate death of a certain *laoch*, 'layman', of Mugdoirn.[894] This man and his wife, living in *hillanamnas dligid*, 'lawful marriage', were under the *anmchairdes*, 'spiritual direction', of Eochu ua Tuathail, abbot of Lugmad,[895] who died in 822.[896] This unnamed man was killed by his enemies, an act which seemed to incite the common people to dissent against his religious way of life.[897] Eochu goes to Dublitir for advice on the issue, which, if we accept the episode as being an account of a real event, would suggest that it took place before 789.[898] Dublitir sets forth the following: a half or a third of the man's property is to be distributed to the poor, one of the layman's sons should offer *a chuirp ⁊ a anmae do dia*, 'his body and his soul to God', a suggestion perhaps that he was to join the Church, and observe the penance his father would have endured had he not been killed, including the dietary requirements, vigils, and labours for seven years.[899] The man's wife should also do penance for the same length of time on both his, and her own, account. This was done, and after seven years the son and mother returned to communion. The spirit of the man appeared to Dublitir, Eochu, his wife, and his son, revealing that through their efforts he has been released from Hell and received into Heaven.[900] As noted previously, the term of seven years was imposed

[894] *Ibid*., §86. The Mugdorna were a tribe of the Airgialla, subject to the Cenél nEógain of the Northern Uí Néill by the ninth century, if not earlier; see Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 114-116. If we consider Sharpe's arguments concerning the term *láech* (note that *laoch* is a variant spelling) we might imagine that, given the man's murder and his own crime, it may have been that he was a warrior; see Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', pp. 88-90. This would assume, however, that any layman (*i.e.*, even those who were not warriors) could not commit the crimes of lust or killing, so, while it is possible that the individual in question may well have been a warrior, all we can confidently say is that he was a layman. It is interesting to note that this man is referred to as a *laoch* 'layman', and not an *athlaoch* 'ex-layman'; the very first individual noted in the text is identified as being the latter; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §1. It may be that the man would not become an ex-layman until he had completed his penance.

[895] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §86. Lugmad, the modern town of Louth, lay near the territories of the Mugdorna; see Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 120-121.

[896] AU 822.9.

[897] The term used for his killing is *iugulauerunt*, which may be an indication of its criminal nature. The dissenting people are simply referred to as *plebilis*, who ask 'quid profuit illi bona facere'. These people were, presumably, nominal Christians denouncing the apparent failure of the rigour of the man's religious observance in protecting him from harm; see *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §86.

[898] As noted previously, Dublitir is recorded to have died in 796. He is met by the spirit of the dead man seven years after the murder, so the very latest date at which the crime could have occurred was seven years before the death of the anchorite himself.

[899] Penance could be undertaken for the sake of the dead according to *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §18. The example offered in this passage is of Moedoc, and all his monks, who secured the release of the soul of Brandub Mac Echach after a full year of living on bread and water. Máedóc of Ferns is noted to have died in 625; AU 625.3. Brandub mac Eochu, king of the Leinstermen, was killed by Sárán the Squinting, *airchinnech* (a *princeps* or monastic superior) of Senboth Sine, in 605; AU 605.2. This episode is also found in the *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §45, where it is made explicit that vigil, abstinence, requiem, and frequent benediction helps free a soul, and that sons should do penance for their dead parents.

[900] This stands in interesting contrast to the 'Penitential of Theodore', which states that the efforts of the living for the dead are futile, that fasting for the dead only aids in the salvation of the person fasting, and God alone knows the status of the dead; U, ii, XIV §2.

only on the most serious of offences: lust and homicide. Given that the layman was murdered, it might be surmised that his crime was the latter, and that his own death may have been the result of a vengeance-killing; no comment is offered in the sins of his assailants. Equally, there is little comment on the sinfulness of the layman; the only crime that is explicitly stated is that of his nefarious murder, which is swiftly passed over. The focus of the passage is on the spiritual practicalities of such an event; what can a family do to secure the release of soul of the departed? This is, in itself, a valuable insight: the forgiveness for sins of the dead can be earned by the living (in the eyes of Tallaght) if family members take on the penance that was to be endured, which included vigils, a restricted diet, and labour. It is curious, however, that the weight of penance is greater on the family than it would have been on the individual: a large portion of property is dispersed, and two people must undergo penance for one. The demands placed on the son seem to be particularly excessive: he had to offer his body and soul to God, and undergo his father's penance. There is no indication as to the permanence of his offering, that is to say, whether he became a monk or he simply joined the ranks of the *áos aithrigi* in a more rigorous, but limited in term, penitential practice. It may be that the circumstances of this case were exceptional, as Eochu had to consult Dublitir, an indication of the esteem in which anchorites were held, and of their capacity to pass judgement on penitential matters. The fact that the common people were upset by the death of the man is also worthy of note: perhaps they saw his murder as a failure of the Church's protection that may have made them reluctant to pay their dues, making the resolution of the matter of vital economic necessity for Eochu.

As noted above, it is stated in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain* that a nine year period of purification was necessary before an individual could receive communion every Sunday. This rite was limited in the cases of those who had shed blood or committed grievous crimes; even if they had expiated their sin through penance, they were denied the wine and were only permitted the bread.[901] Presumably those who had spilled blood were considered unworthy of the blood of Christ, or that the symbolism of giving blood spilled in salvation to one who spilled blood with malice was unpalatable to the Church. This restriction may be linked to a later passage where we are informed that no animal may be killed between the chancel-rail and the altar: this area is reserved for the sacrifice of the blood of Christ alone.[902] Those who had shed blood intentionally were also not suitable candidates for the priesthood, according to

[901] *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §5.
[902] *Ibid*., §16.

Máel Ruain, as it was unfitting for one who had shed blood to make the offering of Christ's body.[903] He encouraged them to do good in some other way, and allowed them to receive communion after completing their penance.[904]

6.4 Who Suffered Penance at Tallaght?

While the composers of hagiographical works may have been alluding to contemporary events and peoples in their works on a given saint, the author of *The Monastery of Tallaght* writes not only of historical figures, but also explicitly refers to identifiable individuals from his own lifetime, and from the lives of his two subjects. It is interesting to note that the author mentions both Cummian Fota and Finnian of Mag mBili,[905] both of whom are associated with a penitential text. The latter appears alongside Columba in the episode concerning a monk who seeks confession without permission,[906] which, considering the relationship between the three saints mentioned in the passage, was not an implausible sequence of events. It would seem that Iona is held in particular esteem, considering the frequency with which the founder of Iona is mentioned, along with two of his successors as abbots, and all in a positive light.[907] The majority of the individuals referred to in *The Monastery of Tallaght* are roughly contemporary with the author, or either of his subjects, which lends a degree of plausibility to the events described, in particular those concerning penitential matters. The text appears to offer a real (or, at the very least, a realistic) account of penitential practices at Tallaght. The most pressing concern appears to have been over proper confession, the honesty of the sinner, the authority of the confessor, and the completion of the prescribed penalty. This anxiety is also found in *The Teachings of Máel Ruain* and the *Rule of the Céli Dé*. These texts offer

[903] *Ibid*., §70. The *Rule of the Céli Dé* adds that a priest who 'falls away from his orders' is not permitted to offer the sacrifice, even if he completes penance for his misdeed; *Rule of the Céli Dé*, §26.
[904] This is slightly confusing as *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §54 states that bloodshed-penitents could receive communion after three and a half years; presumably this stipulation is meant to imply that they could continue to receive communion after their term was ended.
[905] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §40 and §66.
[906] *Ibid*., §66. Columba also appears in §§68-69 and §80. Comgell of Bangor appears in all the same passages as Columba, a subtle recognition of their relationship, perhaps. Columba, in Adomnán's *Vita*, is Comgell's companion, prays for the souls of his monks, and receives him as a visitor on Iona; see *VC*, I 49, and III 13 and 17.
[907] See above, n. 906. Adomnán is recorded as appointing the abbot of Clonmacnoise; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §85. This may be a 'real-world' consequence of the association between Columba and that establishment described in Adomnán: *VC*, I 3. Diarmait, abbot of Iona, is mentioned three times: *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §47, §65, and §80.

more detail on penitential matters than the Penitentials or hagiography, from dietary requirements to the possibility of two grades of punishment, from rites of purification to the demands placed on a confessor, and the existence of a specific house for penitents.

The question is then, who was undergoing penance at Tallaght? Having now examined the texts in some detail, we might take for granted that confession and penance was open to any Christian, lay or clerical, but Etchingham warns us against making such an assumption.[908] Arguing that the Tallaght documents are notably wary of the laity, pointing out the stipulation to refuse their gifts, several individuals' reluctance to receive their confessions, and the perceived laxity of the *senchella* 'old-churches', he advances the theory that the non-clerical individuals who were admitted to confession and underwent penance were exclusively 'lawful layfolk' who lived in relative proximity to Tallaght.[909] These 'lawful layfolk' constitute what Etchingham believes to be a special cast of 'paramonastic' dependants of the Church living under a 'penitential or quasi-penitential regime of periodic abstinence and sexual continence'.[910] He concludes that 'penitential purgation offered the sinful laity renunciation of the world as the gateway to true Christian living, in a quasi- or paramonasticism of one kind of another, involving an on-going regime of austerity',[911] which would, as I understand it, imply that confession and penance was only available to layfolk who consented to becoming dependants of a given church, and who had submitted, in some sense, to the perpetual penitential discipline of monks, rather than being open to the general laity who were free to live in the world, confessing sins as they arose, and performing penance as necessary. To support his theory, Etchingham cites the tale of the murdered man of Mugdoirn, and his punishment completed by his son and wife, remarking that it is unusual for the layman to have been allowed to remain with his wife while undertaking penance, though he offers no supporting evidence for this being an unusual practice.[912] Why must it be assumed that it was atypical for the offending man to live with his wife, and that the standard practice was to live separately while undergoing penance? The tale of the murdered penitent also refers to layfolk asking what good did it do the murdered man to live virtuously;[913] one must also wonder who these people were, and where were they living in relation to the murdered man. Taking into account the description of the penance endured by seven-year

[908] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 260.
[909] *Ibid*., pp. 260-262.
[910] *Ibid*., p. 290.
[911] *Ibid*., p. 317.
[912] *Ibid*., pp. 313-314, referring to *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §86.
[913] '...omnes plebilis videntes dixerunt quid profuit illi bona facere...', *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §86

penitents at Tallaght found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, such a penitent had to fast on bread and water for three forty-day periods, refrain from eating butter of flesh, attend vigils, and perform two hundred prostrations each day. Presumably he was also had to keep apart from his wife on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights,[914] a stipulation which clearly implies that cohabitation, at the very least, was permitted. It is entirely plausible that the man of Mugdoirn lived with his wife, among his own *tuath* or *plebes* (these being the plaintive layfolk of the tale) somewhere within the jurisdiction of Louth; he need not have been a celibate, purgative penitent living as a dependant at Louth itself.[915] Perhaps the establishment was sufficiently close as to allow him to perform the vigils and prostrations, or there may have been a smaller associated church nearby; he may even have received exemption from prostration in return for labour. We find no hint in the text that the anonymous author of *The Monastery of Tallaght* found the fact that the penitent man was living with his wife shocking or aberrant.

Following from this point, the preoccupation with true confession, whether it be drawing out all the misdeeds of the sinner or ensuring that penitents are not lying so as to be burdened with greater penalties, coupled the reservation of taking on penitents as so many fail to complete their allotted punishments, reveals an intriguing scenario: the community over which Tallaght ministered was both lax and excessive in its religious observance. The laity were known (to attempt) to pay their confessors (on the assumption that their sin had been expunged) and did not whole-heartedly engage in penance, and, indeed, mocked others for accepting the strictures of the Church. On the other hand, others willingly submitted to spiritual guidance, some of them being so keen to undergo penance that they were content to lie so as to increase their suffering, presumably operating under the notion that the greater the penance, the greater the spiritual reward. This would seem to be at odds with Etchingham's notion that the penitents of Tallaght were exclusively dependants living under a strict regime, individuals who had given themselves over to the Church and the practice of penance, but rather suggests that its pastoral care extended beyond its own precincts to layfolk of varying degrees of faith, some of whom were sufficiently faithful and resolute to seek out spiritual direction when it was available, and endure the necessary penance. In seeking remission for their sins, some element of these layfolk (presumably those engaging in a more rigorous

[914] *Ibid.*, §14; also found in *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, §63.

[915] We must remember that this tale concerns a layman of Mugdoirn, who was under the spiritual guidance of Eocha ua Tuathail of Louth, and does not take place in Tallaght, nor is directly associated with a member of Tallaght. The penitential practices of the former may not have corresponded with the latter, and so we cannot assume that Máel Díthraib's recollections of details of seven year penance at Tallaght apply to Louth.

practice as a result of grave crimes) may have entered the *teg pende* for a limited term. What we are provided with is a rather credible and nuanced image of the laity not found in other texts, neither resolutely Christian nor simply paying lip-service, but plausibly embodying a spectrum of observance.

Furthermore, if we consider the stipulation to submit to confession at least once a year, and that Máel Ruain appears to have thought it correct to travel a thousand paces or more to visit *tuathibh biti fo anmchairtes* 'laity under spiritual direction' (which would imply that they lived outside the immediate environs of the monastery at Tallaght),[916] it would seem reasonable to suggest that a certain number of individuals who had submitted to the penitential regime of Tallaght were geographically dispersed, and subject to irregular confession. We might wonder if Etchingham's 'paramonastics', individuals living under a strict regime, would have considered it sufficient to confess merely once a year, or if this is, as it appears to be, a reference to layfolk living under the jurisdiction of Tallaght who would reveal their misdeeds when pastorally convenient. Máel Ruain's refusal to accept the confession of any except the most holy may be an aspect of status rather than the laxity of the laity; if we accept that the *céli Dé* were, in essence, spiritual aristocrats, there may have been a gradation of confessors such that it was beneath the rank of the founder of Tallaght, or even an esteemed anchorite, to hear the sins of a layman, even presuming the fact that they would have been diligent in their penance. The founder of Tallaght's command against accepting gifts *ó thuatib*, unless they have completely submitted to spiritual direction, is not evidence against the lay confession, but, perhaps, in support of it: presumably some element of the laity were not giving gifts in the hopes of expunging their sins. Indeed any admonishment of layfolk who were lax in their penance or incomplete in their confession is not necessarily proof that all of the laity did not undergo, or were refused, these sacraments at Tallaght, merely that nominal Christians were discouraged. We might also wonder why penitents were allowed to recite a canticle and a psalm twelve times, instead of one hundred and fifty psalms; one would imagine that inmates of a church, monastic or 'paramonastic', would be required to learn such rites, which may suggest that the simplification was a response to lay participation. There may well have been a caste of 'paramonastic' penitents at Tallaght, and

[916] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §44 and §71. Etchingham connects this reference to 'a thousand paces' to Numbers 35:4, which states that the pastureland of the Levites will extend a thousand paces beyond their town walls; see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 261-262. It may be the case that this reference to travelling a thousand paces or more is simply a poetic allusion to the dimensions of a *túath*, rather than the specific limits of Tallaght's jurisdiction. In any event, the key point is that Máel Ruain was providing pastoral care to the *túath*, not simply his own *manaig*.

some portion of the lay community may have been negligent in the practice of their faith in the eyes of Máel Ruain, but this does not oblige us to conclude that all layfolk were discouraged from submitting to spiritual direction.

Little is made of bloodshed in these texts, other than the description of the penance demanded for the crime. The focus of the only passage which delves into penance for murder is primarily concerned with the completion of the redemption of the sinner rather than with the misdeed itself. This may be simply due to the fact that the focus of the original author was not a discussion of sin, but rather the practical solutions to a penitential conundrum. The *sein-leabhar*, from which *The Monastery of Tallaght*, *The Teaching of Máel Ruain*, and the *Rule of the Céli Dé* were drawn, was not a hagiographical work, extolling the virtues of a given saint, providing precedence for contemporary practice, or a penitential, a stark construction of crimes and their punishments, but rather appears to have served as a guidebook of sorts for senior clergymen, offering precedents and explanations for certain practices, and solutions for unexpected eventualities. Violence itself is not an issue for the author, but the (perhaps not unlikely) consequence of the penitent dying in the midst of their punishment is. It may have been that the author thought it unnecessary to comment on the sin or the terms of penance as his audience would either have been well-versed in the preferred penitential of the monastery, or would have been expected to consult a senior clergyman or anchorite, following the examples laid out in the text. In this sense, these texts provide a useful mirror to the Penitentials, focusing on the practicalities of penance rather than listing the penances for sins.

We must be clear on one very important aspect of the Tallaght documents: they may not necessarily represent the norm, the standard practice of medieval Irish Christianity. The community at Tallaght was seemingly more austere than its neighbours, engaging in practices which drew criticism from older established religious communities. As a consequence of this, we cannot know for certain how much of Tallaght's views on penance and bloodshed strayed from the more broadly accepted version of religious discipline. Even where other communities are referred to in a positive fashion in these texts, such as Louth or Findglas, we cannot know for certain if these institutions were in step with Tallaght, or if the latter adopted the specific practices of the former that it found favourable. It may even have been that the regime instituted by Máel Ruain was no longer in force at Tallaght, inspiring the anonymous scribe to seek out Máel Díthraib to recount it, hinting, perhaps, at a lull in the rigour of, or a discontinuity of some kind in, the asceticism of the establishment after the death of its founder; why else would one ask about the specifics of certain practices unless they had

fallen out of use? Perhaps there were so few penitent killers at Tallaght during Máel Díthraib's days at the monastery that he simply never became familiar with their punishments, but, by the time of the anonymous scribe, confessions of bloodshed had become more frequent and acceptable that the current rulers of the establishment needed to seek guidance from the past. Following either scenario, we might imagine that these recollections may have seen a renewal in the discipline of Tallaght. Though we must be wary in ascribing the perception of penance and bloodshed at Tallaght to the entirety of Irish Christendom, it would not be unreasonable to assume that, at the extreme, the practices of Máel Ruain's foundation were more severe and intense versions of common customs, or that, at the very least, they were broadly in line with accepted teachings, though with acute differences in certain procedures. Sadly, the Tallaght documents are unique: no comparable text from a rival establishment has survived to compare them to, so, while they do shine a singular light into the fog of Irish religious practice in the early Middle Ages, we must be keep in mind that this illumination is indeed singular.

6.5 The Soldier of Christ

In the Annals of Ulster for the year 847 it is noted that, among other things, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn died.[917] The recording of the death of a king of the Éoganacht Chaisil and of Munster is not in itself a unique or particularly odd event to register, but Feidlimid was no ordinary king. Not only was he the first king of Caisel (Cashel) with religious connections, but, over the course of his twenty-seven year reign, he drove his forces deep into the territories of the Southern Uí Néill, raided and burned numerous monasteries, including Clonmacnoise,[918] and took two abbots into captivity, denying one of them communion before

[917] 'Feidhlimidh rex Muman, optimus Scotorum, pausauit, scriba $_7$ ancorita', AU 847.1.

[918] Feidlimid took the kingship of Caisel in AU 820.5. Over the course of his reign he would launch numerous attacks against religious and secular sites: Galinne of the Britons, Offaly, AU 823.9; Delbnae Bethrae, under the rule of the Clann Cholmáin, AU 826.8; Foire, and the utter defeat of the sourthern Uí Briúin, AU 830.4 and 830.6; and Brega, AU 831.9. Delbnae Bethrae was attacked three times and the *termann* of Clonmacnoise was burned, as was Dairmag, by Feidlimid; AClon., 830 (*recte* 832; see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, pp.289-290). Durrow and Clonmacnoise were attacked in AU 833.7. In AU 837.7 he invaded the lands of the Cenél Coirpri Chruim of the Uí Maine, and in AU 840.4 invaded Mide and Brega, occupying Tara. His final violent exploit was an attack on Clonmacnoise during which he was wounded; AClon., 844 (*recte* 846; see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 303).

their death.[919] In spite of this, he was hailed as a *scriba ⁊ ancorita*,[920] counted as disciple of Máel Ruain,[921] and was regarded as a pious ruler who promulgated the (now lost) *Cáin Pháitraic*/*Lex Patricii* in Munster on two occasions.[922] It is also a matter of some curiosity that Feidlimid never took up arms against the Vikings, even though their raids into Munster were becoming increasingly frequent over the course of his reign.[923] As a result of this, Feidlimid has been described as an enigmatic figure,[924] a man who has left behind only a handful of tantalising crumbs in the historical record, leaving us to wonder at how he came to power, what his motivations were, and what, if at all, was his connection to the *céli Dé*.

Conveniently, a recent re-examination of this curious king may shed some new light on the issue. Instead of approaching the career of Feidlimid as one of a secular figure brutally imposing his will on ecclesiastical institutions, Haggart argues, quite convincingly, for the opposite, that this king of Caisel was strongly motivated by religious ideals,[925] resulting in both the applications of force as recorded in the Annals and the recollection of him as a pious man. The linchpin of Haggart's argument is the short text known as the *Óentu Maíle Ruain*,

[919] Dúnlang mac Cathusach, *princeps* of Corcach Mór (Cork), died without communion at Caisel, and Forindán, abbot of Armagh, was taken into captivity with other members of his congregation; AU 836.2-3.
[920] *Ibid*., p. 304.
[921] Craig Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and the "Óentu Maíle Ruain"', in *Studia Hibernica*, 33 (2004-2005), pp. 37-38.
[922] Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 211-212. The promulgations are recorded in AU 823.5 and *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)*, Seán Mac Airt (ed. and trans.) (Dublin, 1951), 842.1. Interestingly, on the latter occasion, the Law of Patrick was brought to Munster by the same Forindán whom Feidlimid had previously imprisoned; see above, n. 919.
[923] *Ibid*., p. 211. Feidlimid's lack of aggression towards the Vikings was not sustained by his successor, Ólchobar mac Cináed, abbot of Emly, who, with the aid of the king of Leinster, Lorcán mac Cellaig, defeated a Viking force in 848; AU 848.5. That year was a turning-point, marked by four great victories of Irish kings over the Vikings, one of whom celebrated his triumph with a pilgrimage to Rome; Byrne, *Kings*, p. 214. Ólchobar appears to be the last of his dynasty, the Eóganacht Locha Léin, to have held the kingship of Munster, and may have gained the title due to his position as abbot of Emly; *ibid*., p. 295. The four victories of 848 were won by the new high-king Máelsechnaill, Tigernach, king of Lagore in south Brega, Ólchobar mac Cináed and Lorcán mac Cellaig (as noted above), and the Eóganacht Chaisil; AU 848.4-7. Máelsechnaill had drowned the Viking leader Turgéis in Loch Ennell (Loch Owel) in 845; see AU 845.8. This event is significant as Turgéis was apparently the leader of a great Viking fleet which plundered around Lough Neagh and raided throughout Connacht and Mide from its base on Lough Ree. For the year 848, a Frankish source records that 'the king of the Irish sent envoys bearing gifts to Charles [the Bald]' to secure an alliance and passage through his lands on pilgrimage to Rome; see *The Annals of St-Bertin*, Janet Nelson (trans.) (Manchester, 1991), 848, p. 66. Though we are not told who this 'king of the Irish' was, both Máel Sechnaill and Ólchobar have been suggested; see Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 247, and Byrne, *Kings*, p. 262 respectively. One might imagine that the latter, as an ordained cleric, would attribute such an important victory to God, and so undertake such a pilgrimage in thanks, but it is not beyond possibility that the high-king himself would have had the same impulse. That said, could Máel Sechnaill have afforded to abandon his hard-won, and tenuously held, kingship for the duration of the pilgrimage? In either case, it is significant that the undertaking of a penitential act was the means through which such a triumph was celebrated.
[924] Byrne, *Kings*, p. 211.
[925] Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn', p. 59

which lists twelve individuals as being in 'unity' with Máel Ruain.[926] Of these twelve, eight can be dated with relative security,[927] revealing them to be contemporaries of the founder of Tallaght,[928] and allowing us the leeway to presume that the undated four may also have lived at the same time.[929] The connection of Feidlimid to these overtly religious figures is reinforced by his association with a monastic centre known as Daire Eidneach,[930] which is, presumably, where he earned the distinction of being a *scriba ⁊ ancorita*. By taking this perspective, Haggart has cast a different light upon the career of this king: each event recorded in the Annals now takes on a religious hue, which may better explain Feidlimid's actions. The consistent attacks on monastic sites, while neglecting the incursions of the Vikings, for example, can be better explained as being rooted in biblical precedence than the peculiarities of the king.[931] Feidlimid, trained as a monk and well-versed in scripture, would see the invaders as a scourge from God, and so the solution would not be to attack the effect, but rather the perceived cause: ecclesiastical centres that he believed were failing in their Christian duties.[932] By encouraging a return to devout practice, Feidlimid may have hoped to end the manifestation of God's displeasure, and, for a time, it appeared to work, as he was startlingly successful on his campaigns, even managing to encamp on Tara,[933] a sure sign of divine favour. The subsequent reversal of his fortunes would have shattered this belief, a consequence of which may be seen, perhaps, in the silence of the Annals concerning Feidlimid until his ill-fated attack on Clonmacnoise in 847.[934] Feidlimid was not, it would now appear, simply an ambitious king who sought to dominate the whole of Ireland, but a devout ruler who hoped to unite a Christian land, waging what would appear to be holy wars to achieve such a goal, supporting, and presumably supported by, his associations with various *céli Dé*.

[926] *Ibid*., pp. 37-38.
[927] Aside from Feidlimid, the individuals noted are Dalbach of Cúl Collaone (AI 800.3), Dimmán, anchorite of Ara (AU 811.4), Eochaid, bishop and *princeps* of Tallaght (AU 812.2), Diarmait ua Áed Róin (AU 825.2), Fland mac Fairchellach, abbot of Lismore (AU 825.13), and Máel Díthraib, anchorite of Tír dá Glas (see n. 797 above), to which we might tentatively add Óengus ua Óibleáin, bishop of Tallaght, who died sometime between 819 and 830; see also Haggart 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn', pp. 38-41.
[928] See n. 795.
[929] Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn', pp. 38-41.
[930] *Ibid*., pp. 42-43.
[931] *Ibid*., pp. 49-50.
[932] *Ibid*., pp. 50-51.
[933] See n. 918.
[934] See n. 918. Feidlimid attacked Clonmacnoise in 846, where he appears to have suffered a wound which led to his death in January of the following year; see AClon., 844 (*recte* 846; see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 303).

Haggart does briefly ponder the merit for inclusion on the list of those 'in unity' with Máel Ruain, considering that there are several other plausible candidates, ultimately concluding that such criteria remain unknown to us.[935] Feidlimid may have entered the community of Daire Eidneach at a young age, and travelled with four of its members to Tallaght, each of whom are named in the *Óentu Maíle Ruain*.[936] How long he spent at either Daire Eidneach or Tallaght is equally unknown, but the contingent he travelled with must have made a substantial impression to be included among Máel Ruain's disciples. We might even wonder how much contact Feidlimid, or even his companion Máel Díthraib (who preceded the king of Caisel to the grave by only five years), would have had with the founder of Tallaght, considering his relative youth, though we could hazard the guess that, based on his later life, he was an exceptional individual and drew the attention of his superiors. It may simply be that this text was written much later and was designed to associate the various individuals listed with Máel Ruain, whether they were taught by him or not. It is interesting to note that, of the thirteen names listed in the *Óentu Maíle Ruain*, three are associated with Tallaght, one each with Kildare and Mide, and the remaining eight with various locations around Munster.[937] This bias towards Munster may suggest that the text is a product of the *céli Dé* of Munster, perhaps as an attempt to affirm their spiritual connection to Tallaght.

In spite of his ambiguous relationship with Máel Ruain, it would appear that, prior to becoming the king of Caisel, Feidlimid had trained as a monk, and his death notice suggests that he was considered, in some sense, to be an ecclesiastical aristocrat. By the very nature of his first occupation, one would imagine that Feidlimid would abhor bloodshed and violence, yet he frequently burned monasteries and raided rival kingdoms. How can we reconcile these two periods of Feidlimid's life? Here again we might find the answer by turning the evidence on its head, as Haggart has done, and rather see the aggression of Caisel as an expression of religious faith. Feidlimid was waging war on behalf of God (if he was, indeed, a 'client of God'), and so it may have been understood that his warriors were operating under a legitimate secular authority which believed itself to be acting with divine sanction. This supposition leads us to a very simple question: how could Feidlimid, as a trained monk, compel his men to commit the grievous sin of bloodshed, and, if he also demanded that they undertake penance, how could he sustain his army for any length of time? It would be

[935] Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn', pp. 43-44.
[936] *Ibid*., p. 42. The individuals in question are Fland Find mac Fairchellach, Máel Díthraib, Fland mac Dub Tuinne, Flannán mac Tairdelbaig, and Feidlimid himself.
[937] *Ibid*., pp. 38-41, and Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 226-227.

excessively burdensome to impose seven years of penance upon an army, yet how could he, a man trained as a monk, deny them the succour of forgiveness? The only options available to Feidlimid appear to have been either the complete absolution of the crime of bloodshed while fighting under his banner, ignoring the plight of his men and thus dooming their souls, or a qualification of the penitential punishment, such that killing in combat is recognised as an act separate from murder. Conveniently for this king, Theodore's innovative penance for killing in open conflict had become established in Irish penitential practice in both the Bigotian and Old Irish Penitentials, the latter of which is associated with the *céli Dé*.[938] Forty nights or one and a half years of penance could wash away the sin of killing in combat.[939] This, coupled with the justification of kings engaging in war found in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*,[940] would have provided Feidlimid the canonical precedence to prosecute violence, and the ability to forgive his warriors for the resulting bloodshed. In Feidlimid, *céle Dé* or not, we may find the convergence of various threads of Irish thought concerning bloodshed, perhaps even the practical conclusion of the apogee of penitential discourse. Aspects of the hagiographical traditions of Brigit, Columba, and Patrick, the *Cáin Adomnáin*, the later Penitentials, and the *Hibernensis* had all suggested that bloodshed could be condoned under specific circumstances, and that the culpability of the individual could be reduced as a result of their martial obligations to their lord, and the duty of that lord to exercise violence was recognised. Most of these texts suggested that the redemptive medicine of penance was open to all walks of society, even warriors: it seems highly unlikely that a king trained in a monastery would be ignorant of such teachings, and a religious education may have cemented in his mind the need for a fighting force which fought with the support of God, support which may have rested on the penitential practices of the army itself.

The early Penitentials of Finnian, Columbanus, and Cummian, and the *Ambrosianum* may have been rooted in the New Testament message of forgiveness and mercy, yet, over the passage of time, the Irish Church was pulled towards the Old Testament model of the kingdom of Israel. Adomnán, for example, saw Columba and, by association, his successors as analogous to the Old Testament prophets who guided the kings of Israel; perhaps Feidlimid saw himself as akin to one of the biblical Judges, called upon to deliver his people from oppression. Such things are impossible to know, but in Feidlimid we do find the

[938] See above, n. 705.
[939] OI Pen., V §4.
[940] *Hibernensis*, XXV, §17. Note that one of the compilers of the *Hibernensis* was Ruben of Dar-Inis, a religious settlement which associated with the *céli Dé*; see n. 812.

ultimate entanglement of the secular and the religious spheres in Ireland, waging war from within the framework of canon law and penitential teachings. It may even be that under Feidlimid, a legitimate ruler supported by the *céli Dé*, believing that he had the full confidence of his divine master, bloodshed was not simply condoned, but sanctioned, even encouraged. Considering both of his disparate careers, it seems highly unlikely that the former would not inform the latter, and that he would not avail of the ideological apparatus at his disposal; one might wonder if Feidlimid made a virtue of killing.

Chapter 7: Kings, Killers, and Penitent Laymen

The problem which lies at the heart of penitential practice is deceptively simple: aside from its necessity in clerical and monastic life, was penance available to the whole of the laity or only to a specific cohort? The answer is a matter of some debate. From the evidence examined up to this point, it may seem self-evident that the Christian religion was dominant in Ireland from the mid-sixth century onwards,[941] and that the Irish Church expected penance to be undertaken not only by those who had taken religious orders, but also by the general population. It would appear that monastic penance moved out of the monastery to become an avenue of terrestrial forgiveness open to all Christians as a means to diminish the duration of the purgatorial fires of the afterlife, or indeed to avoid damnation. This assumption, however, has been challenged on two fronts. Firstly, it has been argued that the term *laicus* ('layman', and its Old Irish counterpart, *láech* 'layman, warrior'), as it is encountered in these texts, did not apply to all quarters of early medieval lay Irish society but rather carried a very different meaning from what one might expect, and, secondly, that penance was not available to the Christian laity as a whole, but was limited to a particular sub-set of especially observant non-monastic lay penitents or 'paramonastics'. These scenarios posit a landscape where Christianity had made only limited advances into society even up to the eighth century, where most people were Christian in name only, and where pagan practices persisted, standing in stark contrast to the idea that Ireland had fully adopted this new faith.

Sharpe has argued that meaning of the term *laicus* changed radically as a result of the interaction between the new faith and native society: it was, as one might expect, indicative of non-clerical Christians at the beginning of the Christian advance into Ireland, but, by the eighth century, it had come to mean 'pagan' or 'brigand', the two terms being synonymous.[942] This leads him to the conclusion that paganism survived in Ireland in the

[941] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 240.
[942] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', pp. 88-90. In brief, his scheme is as follows: *laicus* was borrowed into Ireland, where its meaning became 'lay tenant', an association which was eventually transferred to *monachus* and its Old Irish translation *manach*; *laicus* developed the connotation of 'pagan' by the mid- to late sixth century, such that *plebeus* came to be used for 'layman'. By the following century, since paganism and outlawry were (apparently) near synonymous, *laicus* took on the meaning of 'brigand'. Alongside this development, *laicus* was borrowed into Old Irish at an (unspecified) early date as *láech*, the reasoning being that all free, non-clerical men were warriors. *Láech* in turn influenced the meaning of *laicus* such that the Latin term acquired the meaning of 'warrior' in certain rare instances. Finally, the Irish term becomes a calque on the Latin, with both conveying the sense of 'pagan'. Sharpe notes, however, that *laicus* as

seventh and eighth centuries.[943] While it is not within the remit of the present work to delve into Old-Irish law and literature as Sharpe did, his theory can be examined in respect to the Latin and Old-Irish ecclesiastical texts that have been discussed. It is important to tease out the meaning of *laicus* as the sector of Irish society that this term was applied to bears a direct consequence on our understanding of who was undertaking penance, and especially so for the sin of bloodshed.

Beginning his investigation with the sixth century *Synodus I S. Patricii*, Sharpe notes that *laicus* is used in reference to the Christian laity.[944] This text also refers to *gentiles* 'pagans'.[945] Clearly it was composed at a time when pagans were still a feature of the Irish landscape,[946] and the early Church in Ireland used a specific term to distinguish them from the laity. Sharpe also notes that the Penitentials of Finnian and Columbanus of the sixth and early seventh centuries also use the term in this way,[947] explicitly stating that a *laicus* is 'a man of the world',[948] may have a wife,[949] and possess a family.[950] The latter penitential does offer a penance for a layman who has worshiped in honour of demons or idols,[951] which, considering the fact that penance, not baptism, is demanded, would suggest that this was a Christian lapsing into unorthodox practices, rather than the endurance of paganism. Though not referred to by Sharpe, the seventh-century Penitential of Cummian uses the term *laicus* twice: both penances state that a *laicus* cannot be with his wife during the period of his punishment, and one requires that he surrender his arms during his penitential term.[952] The implication that laymen inherently carry arms may indeed support Sharpe's idea of the developing connection between the sense of *laicus* as 'layman' and 'warrior'. It is worth noting that this penitential also makes no reference to pagans, evidence, perhaps, of the

---

'lay tenant' is extremely rare, and preserved in only two texts; *ibid*, and p. 80, n. 26. Indeed, he also notes that *laicus* as 'warrior' is also quite rare; *ibid*., p. 79. These points may detract from his theory as a more widespread shift in meaning would surely have left more examples.

[943] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[944] *Ibid*., p. 76.

[945] *Synodus Pa.*, §8, §14, and §20.

[946] As noted in Chapter 1, pp. 39-41, this text would seem to date from the sixth century. Sharpe accepts a sixth century date, but allows for the possibility that it may be of the fifth century, see Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 76.

[947] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 76.

[948] *Pen. Vinn.* §7, and *Paen. Columb.*, B §8.

[949] *Pen. Vinn.*, §39. This point is specifically noted by see Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 76.

[950] *Pen. Vinn.*, §27 and §39 (S), and *Paen. Columb.*, B §8. Unlike the scattered references in Finnian, the Penitential of Columbanus orders lay penances together in a group (*Paen. Columb.*, B §§13-25), preceded by penances for the clergy (*Paen. Columb.*, B §§1-12), and followed by penances for monks (*Paen. Columb.*, B §§26-30). This would imply that they were considered a distinct sub-set of the Christian community.

[951] *Paen. Columb.*, B §24

[952] *Paen. Cumm.*, §22 and §23.

triumph of Christianity, or of the increasing irrelevance of the old beliefs; in either case, the important element is that an armed, married layman could undertake penance and return to his lifestyle after it was completed. Cummian's model, the *Ambrosianum*, makes only one explicit use of the term *laicus* under a section entitled *De ebrietate*: it would appear that laymen, and all those who had not taken a vow or were penitents, are allowed to drink in moderation.[953] The laity here cannot be pagans or brigands as the author of the *Ambrosianum* would have no authority to regulate their drinking habits, nor would he be likely to discuss them in parallel to those in holy orders. These texts, from the *Synodus I S. Patricii* to Cummian's Penitential, do not serve as evidence for a shift in meaning of the term *laicus*, except in its drawing closer to the sense of 'warrior'.

The seventh-century *Synodus II S. Patricii* contains a brief reference to *layci qui fidelis*.[954] A canon from this text divides the Christian community into three groups: the first consists of bishops, *doctores*, monks, and virgins; the second of clerics and widows *qui contenentes sunt*; and, finally, the laity who are faithful and perfectly believe in the Trinity.[955] Sharpe argues that this last clause would imply the existence of laity who are not faithful, and, therefore, the term *laicus* included 'pagan' in its meaning.[956] I would suggest, however, that the presence of non-faithful laity does not demand the existence of pagans, it merely insinuates the plausible reality of a nominal, heretical, schismatic, ill-educated, or simply lax Christian laity.[957] These *layci qui fidelis* point only to a cohort of the laity which the members of this synod considered to be worthy of recognition as belonging to the Church; this may have been a tacit condemnation of the less than faithful laity who, though they may have considered themselves Christian, were not regarded positively by the Church.

Sharpe argues that the various references to *laici* in the Bigotian Penitential (late seventh/early eighth century) suggest the sense of 'pagan'.[958] On close examination, this does

[953] 'Laicus sane et omnes uota et debita non habentes, si biberint ad modum et iocunditatem, non peccant', 'Truly, a layman and all those not having vows and debts, if they drink to moderation and amiability, they do not sin', *Paen. Amb.*, I §4. This may be a description of how the author of the text categorised the Christian community: the laity, the clergy, and the penitent. Penitents may have been understood as owing spiritual debts, and their penitential regime may have precluded the imbibing of alcohol.
[954] *Synodus II S. Patricii*, in Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 184-197, §18. On the date of this text, see Bieler, *Penitentials*, p. 10.
[955] *Synodus II S. Patricii*, §18.
[956] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 78.
[957] The fact that the passage in question specifically refers to layfolk *qui perfecte Trinitatem credunt* may suggest the existence of some form of non-catholic, non-Trinitarian belief (perhaps a slur against a surviving vestige of Pelagianism?), but this does not equate to paganism.
[958] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 78. The canons in question are: *Paen. Bi.*, I §2.4, §6, and §7; II §4 and §5.4; and IV §6.2.

not appear to be the case. The Bigotian discusses a series of penances for the wailing of a female dependant over a variety of individuals (these penances appear to be taken from the *Canones Hibernenses I* and are carried through into the 'Old Irish Penitential'): in the first of these it is stated that the penalty for such keening upon the death of a layman or laywoman is fifty days on bread and water; forty days if for the death of a servant woman who died during childbirth, or her cohabitant, *fidem habentem*; twenty days for a cleric; and fifteen for the death of an anchorite, bishop, scribe, great prince, or great king.[959] It is Sharpe's contention that, firstly, keening was regarded as a pagan practice by the Irish Church, and, secondly, that the contrasting of the death of the servant or her cohabitant who 'have faith' to that of the preceding ambiguously designated 'layman' or 'laywoman' indicates that the latter terms identify pagans.[960] Concerning the first point, if keening was such a terrible offence, why was it less distasteful to keen over high-status members of the Church and society than lowly layfolk? Surely it would be more offensive for a pagan rite to be performed over a bishop than over a commoner. Indeed, the Bigotian notes that there are 'innumerable examples' of lamentation in the Scriptures, and that those for whom no lament is made lack merit.[961] In this light, keening may not have been inimical to Church thought, but it may have suffered a residual association with pagan traditions, which is why it had to be controlled and maintained within appropriate limits through the penitential system. Furthermore, considering the fact that this penance is found under the heading of *De clamore*,[962] it may have been the case that what was being punished was not keening in itself, but excessive wailing, an unwarranted or inappropriate expression of grief, which may explain the declining degrees of penance as the rank of the deceased increases: it was more acceptable to articulate greater levels of despair for the death of a king than for a peasant. As for the second point, again, we need not assume paganism, but rather religious laxity as seen in the *Synodus II Patricii*, such that the couple in question may belong to a particularly observant sector of the laity. It may also be the case that proximity was an issue: keening over an acquaintance may have been less acceptable than crying over the death of a member of one's household, especially during childbirth, or in the case of an important public or spiritual figure.

[959] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §6.2-5. These are mirrored in *Canones Hibernenses*, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963), I §§26-29, and OI Pen., V §§17-18. In the Old Irish Penitential, the terms used in place of *laici* and *laicae* are *laiech* 'layman' and *laithes* 'laywoman'; see E. J. Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', *Ériu* 7 (1914), V §17.
[960] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 78.
[961] '...et pene innumerabilibus scripturarum exemplis inuenitur scriptum in canone, et pro malo merito inputatur illi pro quo non ploratur', *Paen. Bi.*, IV §6.7.
[962] *Ibid.*, IV §6.

Sharpe also examines a variety of hagiographical texts, several of which have been investigated in the course of the present work, noting that *laicus* held a variety of meanings including 'a certain man', 'married layman', 'lay tenant', and 'warrior'.[963] This warrior-aspect appears to signify, in most of the examples offered, brigands who were intent on killing.[964] Such murderous bands of men are a key piece of evidence offered by Sharpe, and they appear in several *Vitae*.[965] The members of such groups are described as *laici* who are participating in the act of *díberg* 'ritualised brigandage', which appears to have required the swearing of an oath and the wearing of 'diabolical amulets', exploits which Sharpe equates with paganism.[966] In brief, in many of these encounters, the saint successfully impedes the homicidal aims of the men, and they submit to the will of the saint; some become monks, while others donate property to the saint or submit to unspecified penance.[967] Though he admits that the remorseful participants in *díberg* more often undertake penance rather than baptism, Sharpe argues that this penitential obligation is a contrivance by the various hagiographers.[968] I would suggest that the hagiographers are not engaging in such obfuscation, but are indeed referring to (nominally) Christian laymen: the men in question may have been compelled to fulfil an oath which was enforced by some traditional taboo, which may indeed have been pagan in origin,[969] but, over time, the tradition became divorced from its pre-Christian roots. The men may yet have been Christian, as indicated by the fact that in all of these accounts they submit to what amounts to penance, not baptism (the triumph of the saint in converting pagans would have been, presumably, a far more striking victory than enforcing penance upon Christians, so one has to wonder why the hagiographer would miss such an opportunity to extol the virtue of their saint on such an occasion). Indeed,

[963] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', pp. 77-80.
[964] *Ibid*., pp. 80-81.
[965] *Ibid*., pp. 83-86.
[966] *Ibid*., pp. 83-85.
[967] In one of these episodes, the killers are most likely to have been pagans, but this is due to the fact that the murder takes place prior to the arrival of Christianity in Ireland (discussed previously in Chapter 3, p. 85). Of the other cases cited by Sharpe, the killers are plausibly Christian; see *Vita Albei*, §36 (the offender submits to the saint and offer him his best fields in recompense), *Vita prior S. Lugidi*, §44 (two of a group of men wearing *vexilla* on their foreheads become monks of the saint, while the remainder flee), and *Vita Cainnechi*, §45 (the twelve members of the *díberg* become monks) in Heist, W. W. (ed.) *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels, 1965), p. 126, p. 141, and p. 194. For the Brigitine examples, see above, pp. 100-102. There is no indication in any of these examples that the offending parties are not baptised; they either submit to penance or become monks, which would suggest that they were already Christian. Note that in these saints' Lives, only those of Albeus and Cainnech explicitly use the term *díberg*.
[968] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 84.
[969] Patrick alone encounters a king who wears a sinister amulet and is a pagan; Muirchú, I §23 (1-3, 14), pp. 102-105. This is the only clear example of the practice being equated to paganism, which is not remarkable as Patrick was operating as a missionary in a non-Christian land; rather this point serves to underline the fact that Brigit does not convert the amulet-wearers she encounters, but compels them to penance, indicating the survival of a pagan custom in a Christian context.

in the *Vita Prima* of Brigit, as has been demonstrated above,[970] some of the men in question continue to carry out bloody deeds of violence, but now with the protection of their patron.

The next step in Sharpe's argument is to connect the practice of *díberg* with the *fíana*, bands of roving warriors.[971] The *fíana* served a complicated role in early medieval Irish society; a *fían* consisted of unmarried, usually young, men of the nobility, and it appears to have served as an elaborate rite of passage,[972] or as a means of controlling unlanded men.[973] He also notes that O'Mulconry's Glossary explicitly distinguishes between the two terms, *díberg* and *fían*, a point he unequivocally dismisses as an invention by the compiler influenced by the romaticisation of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his Fianna.[974] Sharpe specifically states that 'we do not hear of the *fíana* wearing *signa diabolica* or the like';[975] I would underline that the *signa diabolica* are a distinguishing feature of the depictions of *díberg*. With this in mind, there is no reason not to view the distinction offered by O'Mulconry's Glossary as indeed being correct, supported by the fact that the customs and composition of the *díberg* that have been studied as part of this thesis do not reflect those of *fíanas*. It would appear that, rather than being synonymous, these were two different concepts. Aside from the wearing of sinister sigils, the evidence of aspects of the Brigitine and Patrician traditions may indicate that kings and their warriors could be involved in this ritualised brigandage,[976] which stands in direct contrast to the nature of the *fían* as a rite of passage for unlanded young men. Indeed, O'Mulconry's Glossary suggests that a warrior could participate in *díberg* irrespective of his belonging to a *fían*.[977] It may be the case that,

[970] See above, pp. 100-102.
[971] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 86.
[972] Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (1986), pp. 13-15, and pp. 29.
[973] Kim McCone, 'The Celtic and Indo-European origins of the *fían*', in Sharon J. Arbuthnt and Geraldine Parsons (eds.), *The Gaelic Finn Tradition* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 15-20.
[974] 'Diberg .i. di-bi-arg .i. ni la laochacht adrimter ut arg fiann, ar ni bi i coir laochachtae diultad de ⁊ giallnae Demuin'; 'O'Mulcrony's Glossary', Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie* 1 (1900), pp. 232-324, §309. I would suggest the following translation: '*Díberg*, that is not counted as good conduct by warriors even if as noble *fian*, for it is not right for a warrior to deny God and submit to the Devil'. O'Clery's Glossary does not discern any difference between *bearg* (a term the meaning of which encompasses plunderer, robber, and brigand) and *díbheargach*, *laoch*, and *fearg*; see Arthur W. K. Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish Glossary', *Revue Celtique* IV (1879-1880), pp. 349-428 and V (1881-1883), pp. 1-69, at IV, p. 371. This point is noted by Sharpe, but, though he dismisses the O'Mulconry Glossary, he offers no explanation of why O'Cleary is superior other than it confirms his interpretation; see Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 86.
[975] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 86.
[976] It is unclear if Conall was king at the time he encounter Brigit while wearing his diabolical amulet, but Macc Cuill moccu Greccae, the emblem-wearing would-be assassin of Patrick, was a ruler of some kind, perhaps a low-ranking king; *VB I*, §64, and Muirchú, I §23, pp. 102-105.
[977] See above, n. 974.

with its pagan roots and accoutrements, the *díberg* was a custom utterly unacceptable to the Irish Church, but that the *fían* served an important social purpose, and so it was tolerated.

Turning to the Irish term *láech*, Sharpe argues that it was borrowed from the Latin *laicus* into secular legal texts, first attested in *Uraicecht Becc* (the 'Small Primer'), gaining the sense of 'warrior'.[978] The *Uraicecht Becc* is not the only text which uses *láech*, but it is the only example Sharpe offers; Kelly offers two instances from legal texts where he translates *laích* (a variant spelling of *láech*) as 'lay'.[979] This would seem to support Sharpe's point that the fundamental concept behind 'layman' and 'warrior' had become blurred, though not necessarily that the meaning of *laicus*/*láech* had shifted entirely to the sense of 'warrior'. The final stage Sharpe proposes in the development of this term is that *láech* as 'pagan' occurs as a calque on *laicus* as 'pagan', citing the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials, the *Canones Hibernenses*, and the O'Davoren Glossary.[980] In both Penitentials and the *Canones*, the term can be understood, as we have seen, as 'layman' (this is in reference to keening, discussed above), leaving his only evidence for *láech* as 'pagan' coming from the O'Davoren Glossary, which is a sixteenth century text, though it draws on older material.[981] The reference in this Glossary would seem to demand the clearing out of, if we follow Sharpe, pagans from churches. Again, I would argue that there is little difficulty in translating *láech* as 'layman' in this context.[982] What we may see here is not an indication of paganism, but rather an Irish symptom of a blight which is known to have affected the Anglo-Saxon Church: Bede, in his letter to Egbert, notes with great horror that within his province many nobles had bought abbacies and received tonsure, but remained married and did not abide by monastic rules.[983] In this light, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Bede's wish to

[978] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 89.
[979] Kelly, *Irish*, p. 42, n. 26, and p. 55. He notes that Heptad 1 refers to the position of an *airchinnech laích*, a lay superior, and that the *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* refers to an *ollam laích* and an *ollam cléirig*, a lay judge and a clerical judge.
[980] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 90, referring back to p. 78, n. 20. The references to the two Penitentials and the *Canones* are in relation to keening, which have been discussed above.
[981] *Ibid*., p. 78, n. 20.
[982] 'Coitreb .i. comtairisium, ut est erglanad eclaise ó laechaib ⁊ laiches[aib] ⁊ coitreb caillech .i. comtairisin caillech n-inglan', *O'Davoren's Glossary*, §542, Whitley Stokes (ed.), in *Archiv für celtische Lexicographie*, vol. 2 (1904) , p. 284. While Sharpe may be correct in his interpretation of *láech* as 'pagan', there is no reason not to translate this as: 'Fellowship (or Community), that is a permanence, that is emptying churches of laymen and laywomen and the company of (old) women, that is a permanence of unclean (old) women'. The implication here, I would take, is not the eviction of pagans from churches, but of laity who were less than observant of correct practices.
[983] Bede, *Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum episcopum*, §12, in Christopher Grocok and Ian N. Wood (eds. and trans.), *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow: Bede's Homily i. 13 on Benedict Biscop, Bede's History of the Abbots of Wearmought and Jarrow, The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith, Bede's Letter to Ecgbert, Bishop of York* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 124-161.

see these indulgent laymen and women expelled from holy sites is paralleled in the directive recorded in the O'Davoren Glossary.

It is also worth noting that the *Cáin Adomnáin* is underwritten by *láechaib 7 cléirchaib*, 'laymen and clerics';[984] this legal text, which can be dated to 697, provides a very specific set of circumstances for the use of this term. It may have been understood that all kings were warriors, but the parallel being drawn here is not between clergy and warriors, but between representatives of the Church and the laity. Indeed, a century and a half later, *The Monastery of Tallaght* refers to the man of Mugdoirn as a *laoch*.[985] Here we have a man who may indeed have been a warrior, but he was most certainly a layman, which demonstrates a continuity of meaning from Adomnán to Máel Díthraib. Furthermore, these examples counter the notion that the term carried pagan connotations as the signatories to Adomnán's law and the penitent man of Mugdoirn were most certainly Christian.

As one last piece of the puzzle, Sharpe refers to an episode in the *Vita Prima* in which 'Conall and his family are called *filii mortis*', and suggests that the Church held early Irish kings responsible for the 'irredeemable sin' of resistance to conversion.[986] This passage in the composite *Life* of Brigit is very interesting, and has been examined in detail previously, but, to recap briefly, Brigit does not exactly call Conall and his family 'sons of death', rather she is speaking to a nun who asks her why she refused to bless Conall's pregnant daughter-in-law, saying that 'the sons of kings are serpents and sons of death and sons of blood'.[987] It has been suggested that the term 'sons of death' may be equated to the *fían*-groups or to brigandage.[988] Patrick, in his Letter to Coroticus, declares the soldiers of that warlord to be 'fellow-citizens of demons', that 'by hostile ritual they live in death'.[989] Such a 'hostile ritual' may imply that these soldiers were participating in something akin to *díberg*. The fact that the group is in the service of a king, and that they are undertaking a 'hostile ritual', bears a certain similarity to the depiction of *díberg* found in the composite *Life* of Brigit, if Conall was indeed a king at the time of his violent activities. Brigit's admonishment of the 'sons of kings' may be a reflection of the author's attitude towards either the son of Conall himself, or the unborn grandchild and future king whom Brigit was asked to bless. Indeed, the sons of

[984] *Cáin Adomnáin*, §29.
[985] *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §86.
[986] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', p. 91.
[987] See above, p. 99, n. 441.
[988] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 299-300.
[989] '...civibus daemoniorum... Ritu hostile in morte vivunt, socii Scottorum atque Pictorum apostatarumque', Patrick, *Epistola*, §2.

kings may have become members of *fían*-groups and may have participated in *díberg*, and almost certainly engaged in combat, making the saint's assertion a statement of fact, but such activities did not prohibit kings or their sons from acting without her blessing, nor does it require that they were pagan. Nevertheless, the condemnation expressed by Brigit in the *Vita Prima* towards the sons of kings is not universal, as she states that some are chosen by God to rule; in a contemporary political light, this might indicate that the compiler was trying to remind the descendents of Conall of their debt to Brigit, while at the same time denouncing those who had not submitted to her.

In the Annals of Ulster we find an interesting reference to a *fían* consisting of *maicc báis* 'sons of death' which had been raiding in the manner of the gentiles.[990] This brief note clearly implies that this group was not pagan, but simply acted as pagans (in this case, the Vikings) did. I believe that this entry may serve as a neat illustration of the relationship between the various terms that we have been examining. The designation of *filii mortis* or *maicc báis* may have been applied to the members of this *fían* as they had behaved in an unsavoury fashion, and not as a matter of course. The *fían*-group, which would have consisted of the unlanded sons of the nobility and kings, was broadly accepted by the Church so long as it did not transgress and act in a pagan-like fashion. Members of a *fian* may have participated in the ritual of *díberg*, which was seen by the Irish Church as an inglorious, pagan-like deed. With this in mind, if Diarmait mac Cerball was indeed the grandchild of Conall, Brigit's hesitation in blessing the unborn child of Conall's daughter-in-law may have been due to his future (from Brigit's perspective, though in the past from that of the compiler of the *Vita*) association with pagan practices.[991] In any event, the sons of kings were 'sons of death' unless they were guided by God, which is to say, guided by Brigit and her successors. This designation may not be a blanket term, but may act as an indicator of those who go against societal norms or Church wishes. The *fían* was a respectable group, as indicated by O'Mulconry's Glossary, unless its members participated in *díberg*, or raided in the manner of

[990] 'Toghal Innsi Locha Muinnremair la Mael Sechnaill for fianlach mar di maccaibh bais Luigne $_7$ Galeng ro batar oc indriudh na tuath more gentilium', 'Máel Sechnaill stormed Inis Muinnremair against a great *fian*-force of the sons of death of the Luigni and the Gailenga which had been raiding the peoples in the manner of the gentiles'; AU 847.3; translation from Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 847.2.

[991] Diarmait mac Cerball (r. 544-565) is noted as being the king who presided over the last feast of Tara; AU 560.1. This has led to the suggestion that Diarmait had pagan sympathies, and even that he was the last pagan king of Tara; see Daniel A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Éiru* 18 (1958), pp. 136-138; and Enright, *Prophecy and Kingship*, pp. 24-25. This latter interpretation seems to be stretching the evidence too far. While the fact that the last recorded feast of this kind at Tara occurred during his reign may suggest paganism, it may also have been the case that he was a Christian from birth (considering his family's associations with Brigit and Columba, and the fact that his grandfather and mother, at the very least, appear to have been Christian) and simply participated in an enduring native custom.

the gentiles, as noted by the Annals of Ulster. The members of a *fían* or *díberg* were not necessarily pagans themselves, they were simply participating in a tradition which may have had pagan roots. Patrick admonished Christian soldiers who engaged in an act which appears to have been ritualised brigandage, as indeed does Brigit. The only clear-cut situation where we are confronted with pagan killers in these texts in is Tírechán, where Patrick resurrects a long dead giant who was killed by a *fian*-group at some point in the distant pre-Christian past,[992] and in Muirchú, where a tyrant seeks to assassinate Patrick;[993] in both cases, the scenarios describe a time in which Christianity was a fledgling influence in Irish society.

While it may be the case that 'layman' and 'warrior' came to be synonymous as *laicus*/*láech*, there is no convincing evidence that the term also encompassed the sense of 'pagan' in the texts examined in this thesis. The adjacent concept of *díberg*, as it is described in the texts, involves Christians who submit to penance, and while *fian*-groups may at times have acted like pagans, its members were not necessarily pagans themselves. The battle-ready sons of kings may indeed have been ill-omened harbingers of blood and death, but they were not pagan. The early medieval Irish landscape may have hosted gangs of rambunctious and violent unlanded young men and murderous roving bands of warriors and kings, none of whom would have considered themselves pagan but merely participating in ancient traditions. That the Irish Church sought to control, limit, or condemn these customs is not unusual or even unexpected: it was, after all, an organisation that was offering a revolutionarily new world perspective, and what it could not integrate into its system of thought it sought to malign or extinguish. The *díberg* is offensive when undertaken with diabolical amulets, but similar practices are acceptable under the auspices of a saint; the *fían* is noble unless it participates in *díberg* or acts in the manner of gentiles; the sons of kings are sons of death unless they are chosen by God to rule. These are not examples of paganism but of cultural appropriation, of the Irish Church trying to gain control over traditional customs. It was a simple dichotomy: by the grace of God, everything the Church condoned and supported was inherently 'good', and anything that did not conform was 'evil'. In any event, the possible collapse in distinction between layman/warrior, and the participation of such individuals in the traditions described (now that the association with 'pagan' has been dismissed), may indicate that penance was afforded to kings and their warriors, and that intentionally violent acts were condoned by the Irish Church under specific circumstances.

[992] Tírechán, [III 1] §40, pp. 154-157.
[993] Muirchú, I §23, pp. 102-107

One might wonder if the term *laicus*/*láech* might yet be restricted to the noble and warrior classes, such that 'layman' does not equate to 'the common man'. As Thomas Charles-Edwards notes, 'Freedom... went with being a *gaiscedach*, an armed man'.[994] In this light, the development in meaning of *laicus*/*láech* from 'layman' to 'warrior' might be better understood as being from 'layman' to 'freeman', or, to be more precise, from 'all non-clerical men' to 'all *free* non-clerical men'. This in itself raises the possibility that penitential practice was limited in scope on another axis, that of freedom. That penance may have been limited to only free Christians is not implausible, as the unfree might have inherently lacked the freedom to choose to undertake the practice. The owners of slaves may not have found it economically agreeable to allow their human property to undertake rigorous fasts or long periods of prayer or exile when there was work to be done. Indeed, the fact that the later penitential texts allow for payments of fines to commute the act of penance itself would suggest that the penitent individual owned property and was free to distribute it. The practice of penance, therefore, may have been limited to the free Christian laity.

Colmán Etchingham would argue that it was limited further still. While he does not agree with some aspects of Sharpe's interpretation of the term *laicus*, Etchingham does concur that Christianity was not as pervasive as one might expect, putting forward a theory which limits the administration of penance to a lay elite. He argues that the lay-penitents depicted in these texts are not indicative of the general public, but a specific group of the Christian elect who participated in a rigorous penitential discipline in a grey area between monks and the laity at large, a group which he calls 'paramonastics'.[995] These 'paramonastics' were penitents organised as a separate sub-group within a religious community, which, though they did not live under a monastic rule, are an illustration of the connection between the monastic element of the Irish Church and its role as a penitentiary, and that, consequently, the administration of Church rites to the laity was limited to this group.[996] Picking up Stancliffe's argument that *glasmatrae* may refer to a special class of permanent penitent, and perhaps also fixed-term penitents,[997] Etchingham argues that the meaning of this term is limited exclusively to the former.

[994] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 69.
[995] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 290-318.
[996] *Ibid*., p. 292. Etchingham is building here upon an observation by Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 40-42.
[997] Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 38-44.

Etchingham remarks that the *Liber Angeli*, the Old Irish mass tract in the *Stowe Missal*, and the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* ('First Judgement of Privileged Ones') suggest that certain penitents, known as the *aés aithrige* 'penitent folk' in the latter two texts, were esteemed members of the community, and were permitted to receive the eucharist, positing that these are the special class of penitents mentioned by Stancliffe.[998] These perpetual penitents lived under a 'perfective', rather than a 'purgative', regime,[999] which is to say that, unlike the general laity who encountered penance as a transactional service to balance the books, so to speak, between their misdeed and their possible eternal punishment, the members of the 'paramonastic' class were striving towards a perfect spiritual ideal through a permanent state of penance, not unlike monks themselves. These perfective penitents, unlike their purgative counterparts, are allowed to receive communion and contributed to the status of their church, and may be what is meant in vernacular texts by the term *athláech* 'ex-layman'.[1000] An 'ex-layman' who is purged of sin presumes the existence of a layperson, a *láech*, who is not.[1001] In Etchingham's thesis, *laicus*/*láech* is merely an expression used by Christian writers to refer to those whom they thought were wrongdoers and enemies of the Church, and, in certain instances, it is used to cast a negative light on those who practice pre-Christian traditions.[1002] As noted previously, the *Hibernensis* divides the Christian community into three groups according to their sanctity: ecclesiastics and clerics, rustic folk, and adulterers and homicidal laypersons,[1003] which Etchingham takes as clear evidence that those not permitted to enter into the sanctuary were not pagan but rather the ill-performing Christian laity.[1004]

Two types of laity emerged from this mode of thinking: one which endured a life of permanent penance of a near-monastic regime and represented the redeemed Christian elect, and one which did not and was not.[1005] One might expect that two types of penitential

[998] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 293-295.
[999] *Ibid*., p. 295. This notion is echoed in Follett's division of penance between *ascesis*, a continuous monastic endeavour which combines the cultivation of virtue and self-denial, and *exomologesis*, specific acts of mortification for the expiation of sin rather than a long-term practice; see Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, p. 25, and p. 33. Follett divides the various Irish penitentials between these two categories: Finnian and Cummian fall under *exomologesis*, while Columbanus, the Bigotian, and the Old Irish Penitential are examples of *ascesis*; see *ibid*., p. 37, p. 45, pp. 51-54, and pp. 67-69. Etchingham appears to treat the penitential texts as a continuity.
[1000] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, pp. 293-294.
[1001] *Ibid*., p. 298.
[1002] *Ibid*., p. 304-305. Etchingham offers a detailed deconstruction of Sharpe's argument for *laicus* indicating paganism; *Ibid*., pp. 298-315.
[1003] 'Homicidal laypersons' was not, as we might now interpret, meant to indicate a specific cohort of murderers, but rather was more likely a label for all Christian laymen who could carry arms; see above, p. 165, n. 786.
[1004] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 316.
[1005] *Ibid*., pp. 316-317.

practice, the perfective and the purgative, would emerge from this format also, but Etchingham dismisses the latter. The former, the ex-lay 'paramonastics', would have necessarily constituted a minority of the Christian community in Ireland, with the general laity making up the vast majority. As noted previously, Etchingham argues that his hypothesised group is identical to the *áes aithrige*, a category of penitents who endured the act of *glasmartrae*.[1006] Here Etchingham builds on Stancliffe's argument that the *áes aithrige* were a separate class of fixed-term or permanent penitents.[1007] The *áes aithrige* are explicitly referred to in three texts: the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* (721x742), the Old Irish tract on the mass in the *Stowe Missal* (pre-812), and *The Monastery of Tallaght* (815x841).[1008] It is worth noting that the latter two texts are associated with the monastery of Tallaght.[1009] The relevant section of the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* is based upon a passage from the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, which quotes Jerome as stating *Tria tantum ecclesia custodit et nutrit: theoricam et actualem et penitentem*.[1010] This last group is rendered by the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* as *aos aitridhe ascnam sacurbuic a reir amncarud*, 'penitents who attend the sacrifice under the direction of a confessor'.[1011] This group is glossed as *athlaich ⁊ ailithrig*, 'ex-laymen and pilgrims'.[1012] Etchingham identifies each of these three Old Irish terms (*áes aithrige*, *athláech*, and *ailithir*) as referring to permanent penitents.[1013] As noted previously, the *áos aithrigi* of *The Monastery of Tallaght* appear under an injunction which demands seven years' strict penance for bloodshed and homicide, among other crimes.[1014] For the tract

[1006] On this point Etchingham is picking up on Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 40-41.
[1007] Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 40-41.
[1008] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 76, pp. 293-294, p.297, and p. 316; *The Monastery of Tallaght*, §11; *The Stowe Missal; Ms. D. II. 3 in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin*, George F. Warner (ed.) (London, 1915), vol. 2, pp. 38-39; and 'The Tract on the Mass in the Stowe Missal' in Whitley Stokes and John Strachen (eds.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse* (Dublin, 1975), vol. II, pp. 252-255. On the dating and location of the *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, see Liam Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of the *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia*, 3 (1989), p. 444 and pp. 456-459; on the *Stowe Missal*, see Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, pp. 132-136, and James Carney, 'Language and literature to 1169', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 1, p. 492; see above, p. 170, n. 800 on the dating of *The Monastery of Tallaght*. The element of the *Stowe Missal* which is relevant to the present work appears to be a later addition to the manuscript, but the whole collection is most likely no later than the ninth century; see George F. Warner, *The Stowe Missal*, vol. 2, p. xxxix.
[1009] Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, p. 132-136
[1010] *Hibernensis*, XLII §2.
[1011] Taken from Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland', p. 446.
[1012] Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland', p. 446; and Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 297.
[1013] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 296-298.
[1014] See above, p. 186, n. 889.

on the mass in *Stowe Missal*, Etchingham merely notes that the *áes aithrige* are counted as one of the various groups which may receive the eucharist.[1015]

Let us turn, for a moment, to Stancliffe and the inspiration for part of Etchingham's argument. The term 'blue martyrdom' is found in three texts: the Cambrai Homily, an Old Irish text dated to the seventh or early eighth century (though the manuscript itself was written between 763-790); the Munich Commentary on Genesis, written at the end of the eighth century; and the Celtic Homily Collection, the relevant sections of which are most likely eighth century in origin.[1016] In short, the Irish Church created a third, unique form of martyrdom to complement the existing two; the traditional 'bloody' and 'bloodless' forms of martyrdom (*derg-* and *bánmartrae*, 'red' and 'white' martyrdom) were elaborated with the addition of the recognition of penitential rigour as *glasmartrae* or 'blue' martyrdom.[1017] For a possible example of this practice, we need look no further than Adomnán's tale of Librán, a man who entered into a penitential colony of Iona at Tiree for seven years before returning home to Ireland to fulfil certain secular obligations, after which he became a monk back on Tiree.[1018] In this depiction we find the acute difference between Stancliffe's and Etchingham's understanding of *glasmartrae*: for the latter, Librán would have endured permanent monastic discipline as a 'paramonastic', while, for the former, his penance was fixed in term, not permanent, such that he could have (and did briefly) returned to a secular life. Following Stancliffe's perspective, if Librán's case is suggestive of the fact that penance was a common custom (which it must have been since there was an existing penitential colony on Tiree to send him to), it provides evidence for the existence of a group of lay penitents distinct from monks who may have been considered to be suffering a form of martyrdom for the expiation of sin.

Returning to Etchingham, when we examine these few examples in detail, we find that his theory of lay penance being undertaken by only a permanent 'paramonastic' elite within the Irish Church does not have a solid foundation. While the scant references in some of these texts do little to illuminate the nature of the *áes aithrige* or *glasmartrae*, there is, I believe, sufficient evidence to suggest that the situation was more complicated than that which Etchingham describes, that these terms also encompassed fix-term penitents. The reference in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* may be too brief to reveal much of why a group of

[1015] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 293-294.
[1016] Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', pp. 22-26.
[1017] *Ibid*., pp. 27-36, and p. 44.
[1018] This example is noted by Stancliffe; *ibid*., pp. 41-42.

penitents could receive communion, though it may recall the process described in *The Monastery of Tallaght* through which a penitent could receive the Eucharist at ever-increasing intervals over a specific number of years, such that even penitents were not denied the religiously vital rite of communion.[1019]

The glossing of *áes aithrige* in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* as *athlaich ₇ ailithrig* 'ex-laymen and pilgrims' may be indicative a rather different phenomenon as to what Etchingham wishes us to believe. A lay elite may have indeed constituted the *áes aithrige*, but in a political, not religious, sense. Stancliffe and Bhreathnach have noted numerous Irish kings who 'opted out', seemingly becoming penitents and pilgrims, beginning in the sixth century and becoming quite frequent after 700.[1020] Stancliffe argues that Domangart, king of Dál Riada may be the earliest example of an Irish king who retired to a monastery in 507.[1021] The first record of an Irish royal figure undertaking pilgrimage is Áed, king of the Airthir, who died *in peregrinatio* at Clonmacnoise in 610.[1022] In the early eighth century, Cellach, king of Connacht, appears to have retired to a religious life after a brief reign.[1023] In the following century, two other kings, both of Connacht, died while on pilgrimage: Indrechtach at Clonmacnoise and Artgal on Iona.[1024] While Áed and Indrechtach died while on pilgrimage, Artgal had retired to Iona, living there for a nearly decade before he expired. Similarly to Artgal, Bécc, king of the Ulaid, and Dúnchad, king of the Uí Máine, took the *bachall*, 'pilgrim's/clerical staff', and seem to have retired completely from the political sphere.[1025] The departure of these five kings to monasteries appears to express the sense of

[1019] See above, p. 181, n. 867.
[1020] Edel Bhreathnach, 'Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*: Perspectives of Ireland, 700-850', in Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (Leicester, 2001), pp. 121-124. Clare Stancliffe, 'Kings who Opted Out', in Patrick Wormwald (ed.), *Ideal and Reailty in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 163-166. Bhreathnach provides a list of fourteen kings who have some connection with religious life or pilgrimage; Bhreathnach, 'Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*', pp. 121-122.
[1021] Stancliffe, 'Kings who Opted Out', p. 165; AU 507.1.
[1022] AT 608.1. The death of Áed, without reference to peregrination, is also recorded in AU 610.1.
[1023] AU 705.3.
[1024] AT 723.3 and AU 782.2. Indrechtach, like Áed, died while on pilgrimage, while Artgal appears to have retired to Iona, dying there a nearly a decade after he arrived; for his death notice, see AU 791.1. It is interesting to note that, considering these two pilgrim kings from Connacht, Librán's *patria* was Connacht, and that Adomnán regarded Iona to have some form of jurisdiction over Clonmacnoise; *VC*, I 3 and II 39.
[1025] Taking the *bachall* 'pilgrim's/clerical staff' must either denote undertaking a pilgrimage or taking on clerical stauts. Bécc Bairche, king of the Ulaid, took the *bachall* in 707 having held the kingship for fifteen years, and died almost a decade later; AU 692.3 (death notice of his predecessor), 707.6 (takes the *bachall*), 718.2 (death). While this may have been a case of political exile, the complete lack of any reference to him in the Annals between his abdication and death may suggest that he retired from politics completely. Had it been a case of simple political exile, one might have expected him to reappear upon the death of his successor, Cú Chuaráin, who was from the rival Cruithin dynasty, a year after his abdication to reassert claim on the kingship, but instead his son became king; see AU 708.1; Byrne, *Kings*, pp. 285-287; and Bhreathnach, 'Abbesses, Minor

the gloss 'ex-layman or pilgrim' noted above: these were laymen who renounced the world and joined a monastery, though not as monks in all cases. There are also records of kings adopting clerical status from the late seventh to the ninth century, though some of these instances may have been due to political circumstances rather than genuine religious concern.[1026] There are also records of previously marginal princes living in monasteries who would later become kings,[1027] which would indicate a certain degree of collaboration and hospitality between ecclesiastical centres and the nobility. It would seem most likely that such princes have been expected to behave within certain monk-like parameters, but without becoming monks themselves, even if only for the possibility that they might one day succeed to a position of power. Taking on clerical status just prior to death may have been short-hand for a death-bed confession (as indeed queens' penance may have been),[1028] evidence for the

---

Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*', pp. 123-124. In 784, Dúnchad son of Dub dá Thuath, king of the Uí Máine, took the *bachall*, and though there is no record of his death, he also did not re-enter the secular scene after this date, even though his successor died a year later, and his successor two years after him; AU 784.5, 785.1, and 787.2. It could have been the case that these two kings were successfully removed from the political sphere by their rivals, but genuine religious intent cannot be ruled out.

[1026] Fínsnechtae Fledach took clerical status for a year between his two periods as king of Tara (675-688 and 689-695), which may suggest that he was put at a political disadvantage for a short time and sought refuge with the Church; AU 675.6, 688.3, 689.2, 695.1. Selbach, king of Dál Riada, took clerical status in 723, yet we find him fighting a skirmish in 727 and dying in battle in 730, which is not what one would expect of a cleric; AU 723.4, 727.3, and 730.4. Domnall took clerical status in 740 yet became king of Tara in 743 (the first of the Clann Cholmáin to do so) having defeated and killed the reigning king in battle, only to retire back into the clergy the following year, though this did not seem to impede him from acting as king, promulgating the 'Law of Colum Cille' in 753 and leading a hosting against Niall Frossach of the Cenél nEógan in 756 who would succeed him as king of Tara upon his death; AU, 740.1, 743.11, 744.2, 753.4, 756.3, 763.1, and 763.11. Flaithbertach was removed from the kingship of Tara by Áed Allán (they were, respectively, members of the rival Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain branches of the Northern Uí Néill) in 734, which did not (surprisingly) result in his death, but rather, we might assume, in his exile, as he died *in clericatu*, possibly at Armagh, over thirty years later; AU 734.8 and 765.2; on his possible retirement to Armagh, see Charles-Edwars, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, p. 233, n. 4. One might imagine that these events describe a situation whereby clerical status was the result of a political circumstances rather than genuine religious intent, not unlike how Merovingian kings dispatched rivals to monasteries.

[1027] As has already been discussed, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn had been a resident of a monastery before being called to the kingship of Caisel, and Aldfrith, *uir in scripturis doctissimis*, may have lived and been educated at Iona from whence he was recalled to take up the rule of Northumbria after the death of his brother Ecgfrith, the reigning king, in 685 at the Battle of Nechtansmere; see above, p. 196, n. 930; *HE*, IV 26; *Vita S. Cuthberti auctore anonymo*, III §5, Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by and Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 59-139; and Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, pp. 48-49.

[1028] At the very beginning of the eighth century in is noted that Cellech, king of Connacht, took on clerical status at death, and act which is not again recorded until the ninth century, where Máel Dún, king of the Uí Méith, Máel Dún, king of Ailech, and Máel Brigte, king of the Conailli all died after taking clerical status; AU 705.3, 826.7, 867.1, and 869.10. Dying *post penitentiam* is an epitaph apparently reserved for queens in this period, and specifically queens of Tara. The queens in question are Eithne, daughter of Bresal of Brega, Gormlaith, daughter of Donnchad, and Flann, daughter of Dúngal; see AU 768.5, 861.2, 890.5. Each of these women serve as interesting illustrations of contemporary Irish politics: Eithne may have been the granddaughter of Fínsnechtae, a Síl nÁedo Sláine king of Tara, and though there seems to be no record of his male descendents succeeding him to the rank of king of Tara, his family must have remained politically relevant to such a degree that his granddaughter was a valuable asset to several kings as Eithne is described as *regina regum Temhorie* 'the queen of kings of Tara'; AU 768.5, and Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, p. 235, n. 6.

very kind of penitential circumnavigation that the Church would have wished to avoid. On the other hand, the taking on of clerical garb could have accompanied a donation to a church along with monetary commutations to secure forgiveness. While the saints' Lives examined in this thesis offer no corroborating evidence of royal pilgrimage, the *Vita Columbae* does provide an example of a king, Áed Dub, taking on clerical status at a time of political inopportunity, only to later return to his violent kingly ways.[1029] Theses scant notes in the Annals are, as we have come to expect, lacking in any detail as to what penances these kings and queens may have undertaken, or how vigorously they adopted the monastic lifestyle. Would they have lived in relative comfort in comparison to the common monk, would they have abandoned all the trappings of rank and status, or was there a spectrum of observance depending on the individual and the institution? Such gradations may be impossible to discern, but these examples do suggest that some mode of penitential discipline was being undertaken by the elite of Irish society. While only the activities of these retired and pilgrim kings are recorded, they may be indicative of a broader phenomenon: the nobility may too have joined monasteries and becoming a constituent element of the *áes aithrige*, but the annalists did not deem such acts noteworthy. Though it may be understood that any penitential discipline undertaken by those who died at a monastic site was inherently permanent, this may have been a consequence of old age rather than the permanency of the penitential demand. The fact that Áed and Indrechtach died while on pilgrimage to Clonmacnoise does not necessarily imply that they sought out enduring monastic penance for the remainder of their lives; it may have been noteworthy that they died while on pilgrimage, but other kings may not have had their pilgrimages to monasteries recorded as a simple consequence that these were common, unremarkable events – pilgrimages end and pilgrims can go home, after all.

Gormlaith was the wife of Niall Caille, son of Áed, a Cenél nEógan king of Tara and a violent rival to Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, who appears to have kidnapped the queen at one point; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1 p. 314, n. 4; and Byrne, *Kings*, p. 162 and pp. 220-226. Flann was the daughter of Dúngal, king of Osraige, and therefore sister to Cerball, the ruler who succeeded in securing the independence of Osraige from the Eóganacht by allying himself to Máel Sechnaill of the Clann Cholmáin, the very king of Tara to whom Flann was queen; AU 859.3; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1 pp. 336-337, n. 1; and Byrne, *Kings*, p. 265. There is no record of how old these women were at death, but, if Eithne was indeed the daughter of Bresal son of Fínsnechtae, she died seventy-three years after her father and grandfather died in battle against a rival line of the Síl nÁedo Sláine; AU 695.1 and 768.5. Gormlaith outlasted Niall Caille by fifteen years, and Flann survived Máel Sechnaill by twenty-eight; AU 846.3 and 861.2, and 862.5 and 890.5 respectively. These queens may have 'retired' to monasteries upon the death of their spouses, either as they were no longer reproductively viable, for their own safety, or were strategically side-lined for political purposes.

[1029] See above, p. 130, n. 598.

The situation of the *áes aithrige* in *The Monastery of Tallaght* has been discussed previously in detail.[1030] This text discusses a sinner who is plausibly a member of this group is as a result of committing the sin of bloodshed and homicide, and the penance imposed on the sinner is equivalent to Old-Irish Penitential term for a homicide committed by anyone who is not in orders;[1031] this would imply that the offender is a layman, and that the term of penance is fixed. Considering the relationship between the *The Monastery of Tallaght* and the Old-Irish Penitential, and the fact that the latter allows for the payment of fines and specific terms of penance, it seems most likely that the penitents who endured penance under the guidance of Tallaght did so under fixed terms, and so might not be considered 'paramonastic'; why offer financial commutations to a penitent who sought permanent perfective penitential discipline? The example of the layman of the Mugdoirn also demonstrates that the employment of fixed-term penance was acceptable to Tallaght.

The final text which uses this term is the tract on the mass in the *Stowe Missal*. This tract describes the physical distribution of mass attendants in the shape of the cross and its voids. The conceptual basis for the placement of the participants is clearly that those who belong to the church reside within the cross, with the laity outside its borders. As part of the lower half of the shaft of the cross, the *áes na aithirge* are grouped alongside *anchord* 'anchorites', but there is also a second gathering of the *áes aithrige* which rests outside of the cross shaft. This separate assembly of penitents within the church service are distinguished from the lawfully married and those who are not allowed communion, all of whom lie beneath the cross-beam and outside of the shaft.[1032] We are here presented with a very tidy demonstration of two categories of 'penitent folk': one of which is seemingly equal in status to anchorites and one which is parallel to the observant laity. This is a clear indication that there were two types of penitents which attended mass, though the nature of these two groupings is unclear. It may be that the penitents gathered with the anchorites were Etchingham's 'paramonastics', that is, permanent perfective penitents who were held in high regard, and that the second cohort of penitents consisted of purgative fixed-term penitents.

[1030] See above, pp. 189-194.
[1031] See above, p. 155, n. 720, and p. 187, n. 894.
[1032] *The Stowe Missal*, pp. 38-39. The portion of the sentence between *anchor* and *aithrige* in the manuscript is illegible, but Stokes and Strachen have suggested the construction *doanchortib ₇ aes na aithirge*; Stokes and Strachen, 'The Tract on the Mass in the Stowe Missal', p. 255, n. f. It should also be noted that the group outside the cross is called the *aes aithrige*, and the group gathered with the anchorites are referred to as *aes na aithirge*. The different structure of the two terms may be a further indication of a distinction between penitents: the 'penitent people' may be understood to be undertaking a limited term of purgation, whereas the 'people of penance' are permanent inmates of the church. For a depiction of this organisation of the congregation, see Diagram 2 below, p. 235.

That said, perhaps this is a reflection of the *athlaich ₇ ailithrig* gloss, such that the mass tract is dividing pilgrims who might return to their lifestyle from ex-lay penitents who might not. Taking these two points together – that the *áes aithrige* consisted of pilgrims and ex-laity, and that fixed-term and permanent penitents plausibly co-existed – it may have been the case that the permanent penitents were the ex-laity and that fixed-term penitents were seen to be pilgrims of a sort. Here again, Adomnán may be illustrative: Librán is specifically noted as undertaking a pilgrimage to wipe away his sins and suffers fixed-term penance, and Áed Dub was to be pilgrim for a fixed number of years.[1033] However, there is one contradicting example: Fintén sought to undertake a *perigrinatio* to Iona to become a monk, apparently in perpetuity, but he is sent away in accordance with a vision granted to Columba.[1034] Even so, there may have been some association between fix-term penitents and pilgrims, a conceptual link between people who undertake spiritual or geographical exile for a specific aim or period of time, as opposed to individuals who have renounced the lay life and retired permanently to a monastery. The ex-laity who accompany the anchorites may be held in esteem in their religious capacity as perfective penitents, but we must also consider the fact that they may have been accorded this position as retired wealthy patrons, that they had earned such a position by transmitting material assets and power into the hands of the Church. This is not to suggest the cynical purchase of redemption, but of securing salvation through financially supporting the Church through donations and alms. It may have been the case that these two different types of penitents were united not by the goal of their penance but in its practice, such that they formed a separate community within the monastery, the 'penitent folk' who lived alongside the monks.

It is interesting to note that among the lawfully married is a group which is explicitly stated as not being allowed to receive communion, which may imply that the two groups of the *áes aithrige* could. This also begs the question of who these non-communicants were; perhaps they were members of the laity deemed to be spiritually deficient for a variety of

[1033] *VC*, I 36 (Áed Dub) and II 39 (Librán). Other notable pilgrims are the pilgrim brothers sought to stay on Iona for only a year and the 'pilgrim' heron, which may serve as an allegory of pilgrims who remain with the monastery for a fixed time before leaving; *ibid*., I 32 (the brothers) and I 48 (the pilgrim heron). Sharpe, in his translation, refers to the wise man Féchna as a pilgrim, but this is not borne out by the Latin, where he is described not as a *peregrinus* like Librán and the heron, but as a *proselytes* 'convert, stranger, foreigner'; compare *VC*, I 30, and Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Columba*, I 30 pp. 133-134.

[1034] *VC*, I 2. The tale of Neman may also be a point of contrast, but we are told nothing of his penitential life on Tiree other than that he refused to follow the saint's wishes on one occasion; *ibid*., I 21. That said, Neman seemingly left the island once he had completed his penance, again demonstrating its fixed nature, but not his status as a 'pilgrim'.

factors, such as not having remained sexually continent prior to the church service.[1035] It may also have been the case that, considering the evidence of *The Monastery of Tallaght*, this represented a third group of penitents who had not completed their ritual purification to the point where they could accept the eucharist.

Reflecting on the example of Librán (and assuming that he is indicative of *glasmartrae*), we can infer from his penitential period on Tiree that his 'martyrdom' was a fixed-term endeavour. Librán finished his penance at Tiree and departed to fulfil his secular duties, and only then did he return to Iona as free man who chose to become a monk; he was not a permanent penitent (or, at least his first period on Tiree cannot be considered as such). Furthermore, Librán is described as having taken 'clerical garb' and he referred to as being on pilgrimage on Iona at which point he submitted to the penance of Columba, which may tie in with the depictions of kings noted above. The description of *glasmartrae* given in the Cambrai Homily would appear to suggest that it covered two forms of penitential practice: separation from desire and suffering toil in penance.[1036] The former may be equated to perfective permanent penance, and the latter, purgative fixed-term penance. These examples can only lead to the conclusion that both of the terms *áes aithrige* and *glasmartrae* could be used to indicate penitents who were undertaking a penitential discipline which was limited in its duration, though this is not to suggest that permanent penitents were not an aspect of monastic institutions. 'Paramonastics' may indeed have constituted an element of the Irish Church, but not to the exclusion of fixed-term penitents. *Áes aithrige*, as a collective term, may have been used to indicate all lay penitents, not a specific category of them, such that the penitents in question may have ranged from those suffering strict penance to lighter terms. With this in mind, it may have been the case that taking the staff, status, or clothing of a cleric and going on pilgrimage may have been synonymous with *glasmartrae*, such that the noted royal figures may have belonged to the *áes aithrige*. If, indeed, Librán and these pilgrim kings can be identified as *glasmartrae*, it may be the case that the term *glasmartrae* held a certain sense of exile or departure from a homeland, especially when we consider the

[1035] The Penitential of Cummian states that a husband ought to abstain from his wife for the three forty-day periods during the year and Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, while the Bigotian demands that those in wedlock remain continent for three nights prior to receiving communion; *Paen. Cumm.*, II §30, and *Paen. Bi.*, II §9.1.
[1036] See Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom', p. 23.

fact that the Irish term for a foreigner was *cú glas*, literally a 'grey hound' (or perhaps 'blue hound'?).[1037]

The kings noted above may have sought to atone for their sins, or they may simply have treated the monastery as a retirement home; if the former was the case, and if the three pilgrim kings are indicative of a wider practice which encompassed the broader nobility, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that these figures of secular esteem and (perhaps more importantly) controllers of wealth would have expected to be treated better than the common penitent, or, indeed, paid for the privilege. As ex-laymen and pilgrims, they would have had to have surrendered their arms and their wives, but there is no reason to believe that the existence of such a lay elite within a monastery implies the religious laxity of the common laity.

The laity encountered in these texts are Christian, though perhaps not always sufficiently so in the eyes of the Irish Church. Those among the laity who undertook penance could endure fixed terms for the expiation of sin or undertake long term observance for more spiritually fulfilling ends. One key piece of evidence which demonstrates this is the first Penitential itself: Finnian notes that the layman's reward in heaven will be of a lesser quality as he is of the world, and that he can take up arms and his wife after his penance is completed. This latter aspect may be seen again in *The Monastery of Tallaght* where the soul of the man of Mugdoirn is released into heaven once his penance has been completed by his wife and son. The sense of *laicus* may have changed over this period from 'layman' to 'warrior', as Sharpe suggests, but in a society where all free men carried arms, such distinction may have mattered little. Sharpe's interpretation also raises a certain difficulty where the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials refer to feminine forms of laity, *laicae* and *laithes* respectively;[1038] it seems very unlikely that female warriors were a feature of medieval Irish society. In this light, it would appear that there was continuity of meaning in the use of the term *laicus* in not only the Penitentials, from Finnian in the sixth century to the Bigotian and the Old-Irish in the eighth, but also in the the documents associated with Tallaght and the Lives of saints. The laity who undertake penance appear to be exactly that: the laity. The only plausible shift in meaning, as noted previously, would be that *laicus*

[1037] The *cú glas* is explained as an exile from overseas in early Irish law, and his rights are severely curtailed such that he has no honour-price and is largely dependent on the status of his wife; Kelly, *Law*, p. 6.
[1038] *Paen. Bi.*, IV §6.2, and Gwynn, 'An Irish Penitential', V §17.

developed from a sense which encompassed all non-clerical Christians to one which limited its range of meaning to the laity who were free.

Even if, for a moment, we accept Etchingham's position concerning the interpretation of these texts, there are substantive criticisms to be made using other sources from the early medieval period. The various *Vitae* of Patrick, Brigit, and Columba do not depict a 'paramonastic' elite – indeed, as has been noted above, the *Life* of Columba confirms the existence of fixed-term penitents – and these saints dispense penitential judgement on layman and cleric, virgin and leper, commoner and king alike. This may, however, be indicative of changing attitudes, as these texts were largely written in, and describe a time before, the retirement of kings to monasteries became a recorded feature of Irish society, such that the emergence of a 'paramonastic' elite is a phenomenon of the eighth century. The *Cáin Adomnáin* enforces penitential compensation on warriors and their families who kill an *innocens* during times of conflict; such violent penitents might not be at home among the spiritually perfect 'paramonastics', and the fact that their penance can be financially remitted suggests that it was fixed in term. Though the Penitential ascribed to Theodore may not have been employed by the Irish Church, its influence can be seen on the Bigotian and Old-Irish Penitentials, which carry over the forty-day penance for killing in times of conflict. These two texts are broadly contemporaneous with the three texts Etchingham cites as evidence for the *áes aithrige* (indeed, the Old-Irish Penitential, the mass tract in the *Stowe Missal*, and *The Monastery of Tallaght* are all associated with the same monastic community), so it is somewhat of a puzzle that they would contain such brief punishments if penance was only expected to be undertaken by an elite permanent monastic caste. Taking these texts in context, by the ninth century, it appears to have been the case that a warrior could accept the eucharist at Sunday mass in January, having abstained from his wife and being free of sin, bury his spear in another man's chest in open war the following Monday, undertake his forty days of penance, during which time he would have had to abstain from his wife, and then, having completed his penance, be free to accept communion again on Easter Sunday. The composite *Life* of Brigit demonstrates that one cult not only offered penance to warriors who killed but also allowed them, perhaps reluctantly, the approval of the Church to kill under specific circumstances, a point which reinforced by the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, and Adomnán's *Cáin* and *Vita Columbae*. With such tacit acceptance of killing in conflict by the late seventh century, and its regulation by fixed-term penitential discipline, it seems highly unlikely that the *áes aithrige* consisted exclusively of perfective 'paramonastic' penitents, but

rather, as the mass tract in the *Stowe Missal* demonstrates, there were two classes of penitents: one which aligned with Etchingham's theory and who were held in high esteem by the Church for their enduring commitment to purity through penitential discipline, and another which consisted of the free laity who had submitted to penance for a specific duration to expiate their sins.

Prior to this period of innovative attempts by the Irish Church to bring violence in conflict under its jurisdiction, it appears to have been the case that it determined penance for 'civil' (that is to say, non-martial) homicide only. Even without repentant warriors and kings flooding monasteries in search of forgiveness with the revolutionary penitential amendment presented by Theodore, there is a case to be made that fixed-term penitents constituted an element of the *áes aithrige*. While the repentant murderer is destined for a life of penitential exile under Cummian and the *Ambrosianum*, the unpremeditated and accidental killer suffers between three and one years of penance; it seems unlikely that such men would have been gathered together with anchorites and perfective penitents. Indeed, the same could be said of the premeditative homicide under Finnian's rule, a penitent of whom it is explicitly stated that he can return to his wife after penance. Particularly keen members of the laity may well have been welcomed into the Church as 'paramonastics' from an early stage, as Etchingham suggests, but they were not the only lay penitents who sought the expiation of sin.

This is not to suggest that monasteries were packed to the rafters with penitent homicidal laymen or blood-soaked warriors. A layman who sought out forgiveness for homicide may have been a relative rarity as, firstly, the individual in question had to feel a sufficient degree of remorse to confess the sin, and, secondly, they had to be free to undertake penance (secular obligations may have trumped spiritual, as early Irish law would have demanded bonded servitude or payment as punishment for such a crime). Indeed, a layman might not have thought he had committed a sin in a society in which there were so many legal avenues to kill. Those atoning for bloodshed may have constituted a relatively small number within the Church until the late seventh century, when warriors could then secure forgiveness for their violent deeds. That said, there were ample numbers of penitents at Iona to require a separate colony, many of whom were undertaking fixed-term sentences, and the fact that the mass tract in the *Stowe Missal* makes special provision for them is suggestive of their constituting a large element of the congregation. The brief penance for killing in conflict introduced into Ireland by the eighth century may have significantly increased the number of laymen who sought penance on a fixed-term basis, but, sadly, no church or monastery saw fit

to provide future generations with helpful lists of their inmates, the duration of their terms, how many successfully completed such terms, and what was their chosen profession. The Irish Penitentials demonstrate that laymen could undertake penance, or, at the very least, that the Irish Church expected that they might do so; the fact that such penances existed, and that they developed in nuance and duration, is suggestive of their use, of a pastoral interaction with the laity. Penitential discipline among the laity is an important topic in hagiography – the length of Librán's tale alone (second only to the account of Columba's death) is testament to the significance of lay penitential discipline at Iona – but especially so as it illustrates the attempts of the Church to bring violent conflict under its control. The Annals depict kings undertaking pilgrimages, presumably seeking out forgiveness for their inevitably violent rise to power, just as certain hagiographical texts depict them and their warriors operating under the auspices of the Church with unrepentant bloodshed. Throughout the early medieval period, the Irish Church refined its understanding of the sin of bloodshed from a simple premeditated/unpremeditated dichotomy to one which accounted for such distinctions as revenge and killing at the command of another. From the king of the highest order to the lowest grade of freeman, atoning for killing was increasingly relevant and available to all.

Conclusion

Could an early medieval Irish Christian layman undertake penance? A deceptively simple question. It has been argued, to varying degrees, that the laity as a whole were not uniformly Christian, but rather that secular Irish society consisted largely of nominal folk-Christians at best, or, at worst, outright pagans. True Christian observance, even as late as the days of Máel Ruain, was apparently limited to the constellation of monastic centres, ecclesiastical sites, and ascetic retreats which populated the lands of the Irish, and though numerous, they were mere pinpricks of light in an otherwise bleak void. Salvation and the succour of the Church were limited to those committed to the religious lifestyle and their dependants, from monks to *manaig*, virgins to widows, bishops to abbots. The vast majority of the secular Irish persisted in a miasma of unyielding, unforgivable violence, unredeemed and unredeemable. This perspective arose from the same impetus that challenged the accepted order that Irish Christianity was uniquely monastically inclined and rapidly accepted by the Irish themselves; to challenge the availability of pastoral care was to challenge the success of the Church itself. By recognising the inherent bias in the sources and combing through them for nuance and detail, the apparently unassailable edifice of the monastic *paruchia* was slowly chipped away to reveal the necessity of an episcopal, clerical Church behind the great monastic federations to provide the pastoral care required by the laity. And who composed this laity? This was refined to include only the 'lawful laity', the *áes aithrige*, the 'paramonastics', and the *manaig*; those who had submitted to the Church spiritually or had become its tenants. The established debate then rests upon two opposing views: that pastoral care was available to the entire Christian laity or only to a specific set of Christians within the laity. One aspect of pastoral care was the administering of penance, and, as I hope to have shown, the manner in which the sin of bloodshed was dealt with among the Irish over the course of the early medieval period is especially useful in offering an avenue into answering this question.

Though in its earliest days it may have followed Continental models of penance and attitudes towards violence, the Irish Church was soon to offer its own solutions to the problems it faced. The *Synodus I S. Patricii* offers a surprisingly brief term for the sin of homicide which, one might imagine, is the result of a new faith trying to ease its strictures to win converts. Perhaps Patrick, and Palladius too, were like Paul, moving from one location to

the next, evangelising, ensuring conformity, building churches. In such times it would have been relatively easy to distinguish a layman from the masses: he was Christian, and penance may have been enforced through the same sense of communal action found on the Continent and in Patrick's letter to Coroticus, that is, excommunication from the community until repentance and satisfactory compensation.

That said, Patrick's letter also demonstrates the failure of such a system: his first (lost) letter did not bring the soldiers of Coroticus to heel. By the time of Finnian's Penitential, however, we find a figure more confident in the authority of his church (whether it was at Clonard or Mag mBili) to regulate penance among the clergy and the laity. It is at this point, in a land no longer dominated by paganism, that the issue of the laity comes to the fore. The layman in this text could represent any free man willing to submit to the practice. Drawing on British precedents, Finnian brought repeatable, fixed-term monastic penance out from the monastery into clerical, pastoral service. This penance was most likely limited in practice to the lay dependants of Finnian's establishment itself, and the other centres which adopted his system, but this is not to say that it was not available to any repentant layman. The penance for homicide demonstrates that a layman could return to his wife at the end of his term, that he could return to his lay lifestyle and all that it entailed. Such a penance may have been available to any layman who killed in the region under the jurisdiction of a bishop or an abbot who adhered to the suggestions of this handbook. The lay tenants of the Church may have been especially compelled to submit to penance, but it may have been hoped that others beyond the ecclesiastical enclosure would seek out confession and absolution.

By the ninth century, penances for killing had become varied and complicated. The Old Irish Penitential, the last of the handbooks examined in this thesis, is a world apart from Finnian, suggesting penances for lay killing in revenge, by accident, through anger, and even in battle; outright murder is divided into separate grades of penance based on the relationship of the victim to the offender. These penances had been accumulated over time, though the key contributions can be traced to the *Ambrosianum* and 'The Penitential of Theodore'. This by itself, the fact that the penitential system was changing, becoming ever more refined and nuanced, would suggest an active debate between the Church and secular society over the nature of the sin of killing. This process of negotiation actively sought to expand the role of penance beyond the *manaig* (if it was indeed functionally limited to them), going so far as to bring warriors, those most blood-stained of laymen, into the penitential fold. Aside from the possibility that the Irish (and Anglo-Saxon) Church may have anticipated the employment of

warriors by ecclesiastical centres, such a penance seems to be a clear attempt to bring all the freemen of the *túath* into the penitential system, to save them from unredeemed sin, a final hurdle to reconcile a form of intentional killing which was seen to be socially, and perhaps morally, separate from the sin of homicide. The penance for killing in battle, coupled with the penances for kin-slaying and revenge, is highly suggestive of a level of pastoral care beyond that which 'para-monastics', widows, and virgins would have required. From the sixth to the eighth century, the focus of lay penance may have shifted from the *manaig*, a limitation of practicality which does not necessarily prohibit the possibility of widespread availability, to the whole community, from lay tenant to free farmer, from the soldier of Christ to the warrior at war. The Penitentials, by their nature, offer no example of actual practice. Consequently, one might argue that the Church was debating the issue of lay redemption with itself, inventing penances for sins which no layman ever came to confess, an ambiguity which has provided space for hypothesis of limited lay participation. Such ambiguity demonstrates why a text or a body of related texts should not be looked at in isolation.

The tale of Librán, if we accept that he was indeed contemporaneous with Columba, offers a rare insight into penitential practice. Librán was a layman who submitted to fixed-term penance, which he undertook at a specific location, and who, after absolution, was free to return to his lay life, though he chose not to do so. He was not a *manach* of Iona; he had run away from servitude, and had taken to penitential exile of his own free will. Librán alone may not be indicative of a widespread and common practice of penance among the laity (the very fact that Adomnán pays such attention to this story may imply the rarity of such events). But he was not unique: other laymen approached Columba to seek the forgiveness of sin. Librán does, however, provide a possible model for what Finnian demanded: a layman who separated himself from his wife and community for a fixed time that terminated at Easter mass to atone for his sin, after which he was allowed to return to his lay lifestyle.

Equally, in parallel to the demands of the Old Irish Penitential, *The Monastery of Tallaght* provides several hints of real world practice which when taken together are suggestive. The man of the Mugdoirn lives with his wife while undergoing his penitential demands, which might imply that the requirements for his atonement are limited to the rigorous observance of fasting during the three Lents and holy days, vigils, and sexual continence for fixed periods, rather than a relocation to a specific site apart from his family. Finnian and Columba expected their penitents confessing major sins to become quasi-monastic, but Tallaght allowed its lay sinners to reduce their terms through payments and

may have not required them to join the monastery in all cases. There may yet have been permanent lay 'para-monastics' at Tallaght, but not to the exclusion of fixed-term lay non-monastics, a point which is reinforced by the division of penitents in the mass tract in the *Stowe Missal*. The lay murderer may have suffered a more arduous term than the man of the Mugdoirn, but a warrior could atone for his sins with forty nights of penance, a system which would have benefited not only the warrior, but also his commander. Feidlimid and Ólchobar, two kings of Caisel with close links to the Church (the latter was abbot of Emly!), two kings who frequently waged war, two kings who would have been uniquely familiar with the penitential system, may have found this particular penance especially useful, allowing them to conduct their bloody campaigns in the belief that their warriors could atone for their actions. Even if one were to disregard the association of these kings with Tallaght and its penitential thought, a forty-night penance is nothing compared to the threat of an eternity of fire and suffering; a Christian warrior would be foolish not to avail himself of such a remittance. There is also a notable increase in royal penitential acts recorded in the Annals by the ninth century, which may be indicative of wider participation among the nobility and warrior-class now that the Church had created an avenue for the remittance of their sins.

The (plausible) parallels between these examples and the demands of the Penitentials offer only one vision of the relationship between penance, the Church, and secular authority. Adomnán, for example, used his *Vita* of Columba as a vehicle to reinforce spiritually the demands of his *Cáin*. Through his law, the ninth abbot of Iona attached a penitential system to secular law concerning various forms of killing, the most significant of which was the definition of non-combatants in times of conflict. He must have had some hope that such penances could be enforced on the criminal and sinful deeds of a warrior, which would imply that penance was an accepted, or acceptable, feature of society by his day. Writing at roughly the same time, Adomnán and Theodore arrived at alternative solutions to the same problem of how to reconcile the necessarily bloody deeds of warriors with the Church's stance on killing: the Abbot's Law stated that a warrior need only suffer penance if he had killed an *innocens* – though the consequences for doing so could be fatal – while the Archbishop required only a brief term of penance to absolve a warrior of such sins. Yet, Adomnán did not offer absolution to the warrior, only a set of parameters within which he could kill without suffering penance – which is not quite the same as Theodore's granting of absolution through penance. (In the former system of thought, killing was an acceptable sin, and, for the latter, a forgivable one.) In this sense, it would appear that a very fine line was being drawn in the

Cáin, the difference between the tolerance and the acceptance of killing; in terms of penance and forgiveness, the warrior remained unaccounted for, his deeds, though legal, may yet have been subject to other penitential demands. It is not difficult to imagine how a particularly remorseful warrior, who may have adhered rigidly to the Abbot's law, could still seek the purgation of the acceptably accumulated sins of killing in battle from the penitentials influenced by the Archbishop: he could atone for his legally accepted, and ecclesiastically tolerated, killings. As for the warrior who committed acts of killing rendered illegal by the *Cáin*, one might see how it would be in his, and perhaps his lord's and kin-group's, best interest to ignore the Law and submit to the comparatively slight suffering demanded by the later Penitentials. Thus the Penitential attributed to Theodore undermined the authority Adomnán's *Cáin* had sought to impose.

The *Canones Hibernenses I* states that the penance for homicide is seven years but also records that another authority demands ten. The Penitential handbooks were not, it would seem, universally employed or accepted in the Irish Church without criticism or alteration. To take an extremely limited view of their popularity, each surviving Penitential may only suggest that specific ecclesiastical centres used these handbooks, confining their orbit to Mag mBili, Bangor, Clonfert, and Tallaght, and their affiliated sites. In contrast to this, the simple fact that these texts were transmitted between, and edited within, various centres in Ireland itself, found their way into the hands of Theodore, and established a second life on the Continent would suggest a certain degree of popularity and use within Irish Church. It must be recognised that that the Penitentials were not designed to be static texts, but were meant to adapt to pastoral needs (recall that Finnian suggested that his own work should be amended by its users accordingly). In this light, it may be the case that what has survived are the exemplars, the essential texts that formed the foundation for localised handbooks which did not survive the test of time. Since not all priests or confessors would encounter all sins, it may have been the case that certain penances were common knowledge, with more difficult issues being referred to senior ecclesiastics who may have, in turn, consulted their episcopal or monastic library to judge the appropriate penance, a library which may have included a variety of penitential handbooks. Indeed, in an era where learning by rote was standard, in a culture which supported a professional class of poets who memorised vast amounts of stories, histories, traditional lore, and genealogies,[1039] physical handbooks of penance may have been superfluous save for the initial stages of the education

[1039] Kelly, *Law*, p. 47.

of a priest or for comparative purposes. The *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* may demonstrate that a multiplicity of penances, especially in terms of the various forms of killing, were available to the layman even as late as the eighth century, ranging from the short-term of the *Synodus I Patricii* to the permanent exile demanded by Cummian.[1040] One system may have been preferred over another, such that Finnian was superseded by Cummian, Cummian by Theodore, and Theodore by the *Bigotianum* and the Old Irish Penitentials, but they were not forgotten, and may have remained in use in certain locations.

This idea, that certain Penitentials formed the core of penitential thought which could be amended and altered to suit the needs of a given community, may explain why only certain documents were transmitted outside Ireland. The Irish Church did not exist in a vacuum, and just as it had received its foundations in penitential thought from Britain and the Continent, so too did it export its own unique perspective on the solution to the reluctance of the laity to submit to penance. Columbanus and his Penitential were only examined in this thesis insofar as they were indicative of practices among the Irish, but their influence on monasticism and penance was wide-ranging and enduring: the Penitential of Columbanus became the core of many Continental penitentials. The Penitentials of Cummian and Theodore also found a second life on the Continent, amalgamated with a Frankish penitential by the monastery of Corbie to form what is known as the *Excarpus Cummeani*,[1041] a text which many more Continental penitential handbooks drew upon as a source. Instead of setting off on his *peregrinatio* with a library of penitential teachings, a practically-minded monk or cleric might only carry with him key texts which were indicative of schools of thought: Finnian's Penitential may have been recognised as the foundational text, with Cummian providing the first major revision through grafting together Finnian and the (seemingly forgotten) *Ambrosianum*. Cummian was, in turn, amended by Theodore, a text which was exported back to Ireland and integrated into the established penitential system. While it is not within the remit of the present work to examine these Continential texts in any great detail, their popularity would suggest that Insular, monastically inspired, fixed-term penance under episcopal direction was an agreeable state of affairs to many, though not

[1040] Note that the *Hibernensis* does not cite Cummian as a source, but Dionysius; see *Hibernensis*, XXVIII §10.
[1041] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, pp. 108-111.

all.[1042] Indeed, while the content of the Insular Penitentials might have been met with suspicion by some, the format of a convenient handbook was readily adopted.

For a repentant Irish lay-killer in the fifth century, penance would have been a tremendous undertaking: he may have been granted some reduction in his penitential term if he had killed in the heat of the moment, but nonetheless the rite of penance was a second baptism, and to sin again put his immortal soul at risk. Four hundred years later, the term a layman suffered for killing another depended on numerous factors, ranging from whether he had murdered his brother or killed his brother's killer, or had killed accidentally or in war. It was even possible under certain circumstances to commute aspects of his penance, by paying fines or undertaking more rigorous but brief penitential acts, or even by having a family member suffer in his stead had his penitential term been rudely interrupted by his own death. And, perhaps most importantly, this was no longer a second baptism, the sinner was not condemned to a life of perpetual exclusion for an accident or a moment's indiscretion; once returned to the altar, he returned to society. Penance was no longer a final act, a terminal deed which removed a sinner from the community (even if only from their own fear of falling into sin again); this was, in many respects, due to the changing understanding of bloodshed within the Church. This change is indicative of an important political, theological, and social shift in the relationship between the Church, the laity, and secular authority, but, at its core, penance was medicine for the soul, it was a deeply human and humane bond between sinner and confessor. One man sat with another and bared his soul, hoping to assuage his guilt, free his soul from possible torment, and fulfil social and familial obligations. With such personal interactions, it is impossible that the nature of confession, sin, and penance would not evolve and change, that it would not grow in consideration and political nuance.

It was not the strange predilections of Irish monks that led them to invent lists of foul deeds, but a deep sense of compassion for the afflicted layman who was truly sorry for his crime. Through grappling with the various forms of the sin of bloodshed, the Irish Church negotiated and justified its position in secular Irish society, and, through the resulting evolution of penitential practice, increasing lay participation can be reasonably hypothesised. The moral absolute of 'Thou shalt not kill' had faced certain difficulties when Christianity was made a pillar of the Roman Empire, when the God of Christ replaced the pantheon that

[1042] The council of Paris (829) called for the abolishment of the various penitential handbooks, and Archbishop Ebo of Reims, who led that synod, requested that one authoritative penitential be promulgated by Halitgar, bishop of Cambrai, which became widely disseminated; *ibid*., pp. 130-132

protected the legions in their violent exploits; these difficulties were inherited by the early medieval Church which sought patronage and support from the new Germanic rulers and their warrior retinues which had swept into the post-Roman vacuum. The struggle resulted in a variety of solutions across Christendom, and the Irish quirk of offering fixed-term, repeatable penance to the laity, even for the most sinister of sins, might have remained an Insular phenomenon were it not for the missionaries which streamed from that remote corner of Europe to its political heartlands and the peripheries of conversion. Where once Christians had suffered martyrdom rather than violent insurrection, penitential 'martyrdom' could absolve a layman of bloody deeds. Penance, among the Irish at the very least, increasingly became an aspect of secular society, whether as a spiritual augmentation to legal demands or the means through which one could return to the Christian community after having committed an act which demanded exclusion. While it may have been available to all laymen from its inception, this new style of penitential restoration may at first have been undertaken by only the most faithful of the laity, but, by the ninth century, the nuance, gradation, and, in some cases, brevity of the penances for bloodshed could have been very attractive to the lay sinner. The Penitentials themselves offer many clues and hints to the broadening of their implementation, and by looking further afield at other genres which describe penance, we can see that this purgative act became a feature of society, which, even if not undertaken, was understood by, and available to, the laity. Penitent laymen slowly became a feature of the landscape, quartered away in specific buildings and designated areas or ministered to by travelling confessors. Penance may have been available to all, but undertaken by few, in the age of Finnian, but by the era of Máel Ruain it may have become a common sight to see a substantial number of penitents, both fixed- and long-term, occupying a specially allocated space in the church during mass. Murderers and warriors may have rubbed shoulders during services and shared meals as the *áes aithrige*, while retired kings may have been granted a position of esteem along with the anchorites. Where once there was no mechanism to forgive warriors their violent deeds, now there was; where once there had been no limits on the violence of war, there was, for a brief time, the recognition of a distinction between combatants and non-combatants; where once there was no practical difference between a murderer and an unintentional killer in the eyes of the Church, now there were several discrete forms of killing; where once a layman who had killed in service of his lord may have been condemned as a homicide, now he could return to his wife and family after a mere forty days of penance. This evolution in penitential thought charts the integration of the Church into secular Irish society, its adaptation to the social demands placed on laymen, and its

attempts to bring about a biblical vision of how society should be ordered. The sin of killing, as I have argued, was a key factor in this negotiation: the changing attitudes towards bloodshed act as markers in the development of the Church's interaction with the laity, and the slow refinement of the sins of killing are indicative of confessors confronted by the practicalities of encouraging the laity to engage in penance while also reflecting on the nature of intent and culpability. Patrick may not have recognised the Irish Church of the ninth century, an organisation whose cause he was instrumental in advancing, but, equally, a bishop of the ninth century would find Patrick's world alien: the Christian community had moved from a position of an often persecuted minority, from small populations in which sins were confessed before the congregation, to the dominant (even if imperfectly so) spiritual perspective, an organisation wedded to secular power structures, influenced by dynastic concerns. The Irish Church did not lose sight of the common man in this process: its pastoral operations remained an essential aspect of its mission, not least because of its duty to the laity in return for dues. Any free man could seek absolution, and though the path may have been arduous, even a killer could be forgiven for his sins, but this was not the important change: penance had been available to a killer before the arrival of Christianity to Ireland. The difference was not only in the manner of his confession and the duration of his penitential term, but in the understanding of his culpability in the sin. The changing practices of penance and ecclesiastical attitudes towards bloodshed demonstrate that a layman could indeed undertake penance, that a humble sinner could work towards his own salvation over a specific period of time, and that even a warrior red with the blood of his enemies could quickly atone for killing.

Appendix: Diagrams, Tables, and Timeline

DIAGRAM 1: A SCHEMATIC RELATIONSHIP OF THE PENITENTIAL TEXTS DISCUSSED IN THE THESIS

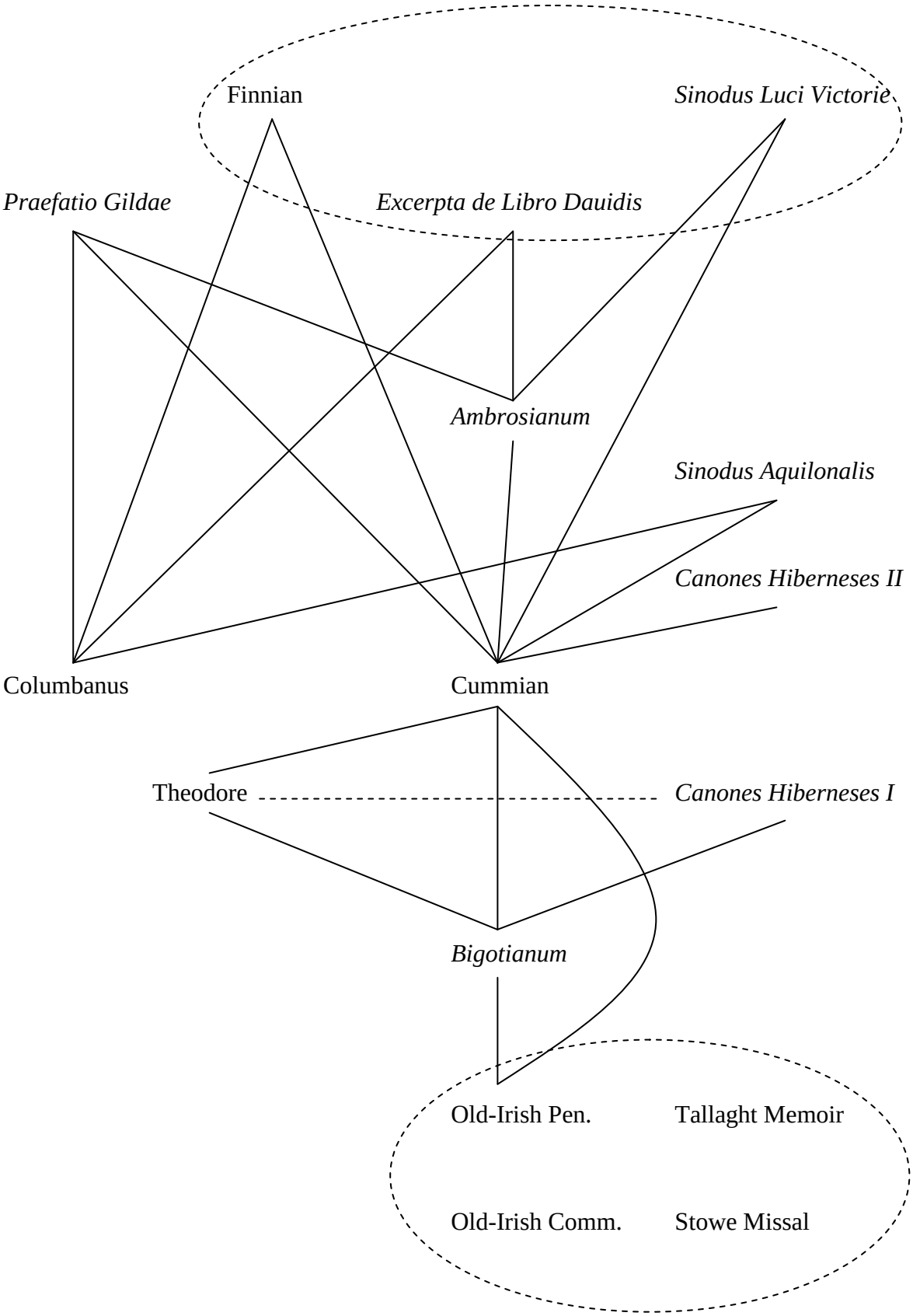


DIAGRAM 2: A DEPICTION OF CONFRACTION AT EASTER AND CHRISTMAS AS DESCRIBED IN THE OLD IRISH TREATISE ON THE MASS IN THE STOWE MISSAL

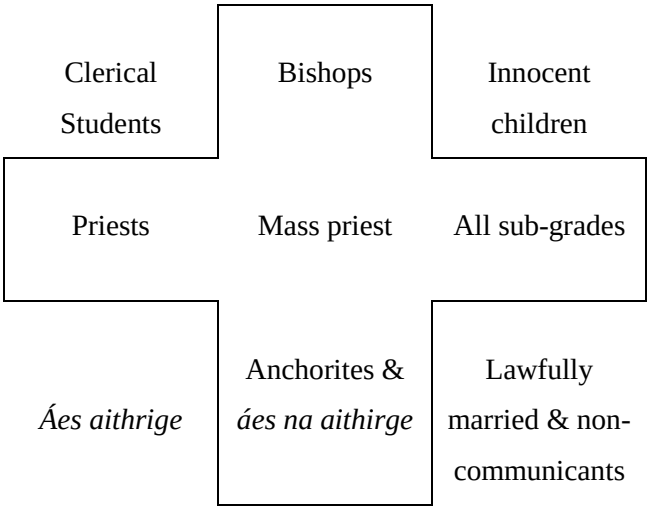


TABLE 1: PARTICULAR PENITENTIAL TEXTS

	SYNODUS I S. PATRICII	*PRAEFATIO GILDAE*	*SINODUS LUCI VICTORIE*	*EXCERPTA DE LIBRO DAUIDIS*		*PENITENIALIS VINNIANI*		*PAENITENTIALE S. COLUMBANI*	
Audience	***Christianus***	**Clergy & Monks**	***uotum perfectionis***	**Clergy & Monks**	**Laity**	**Clergy**	**Laity**	**Clergy & Monks**	**Laity**
Premeditated	1 year			13 years: bishop 7 years: presbyter 6 years: deacon 4 years: monk	3 years	10 years exile with 7 years penance	3 years unarmed and celibate; must provide feast	10 years, monk; 10 years + exile, cleric;	3 years unarmed exile
Unpremeditated, 'through anger'			3 years			3 years bread & water followed by 3 years without meat & wine, all in exile			
Forced aiding of barbarians			13 years						
Voluntary aiding...			Permanent penance						
...leading to bloodshed			Lay aside arms until death						
Thought-crime		40 days, 2x40 days, expulsion				6 months bread & water, and 1 year without meat & wine	7 days	6 months (monk only)	

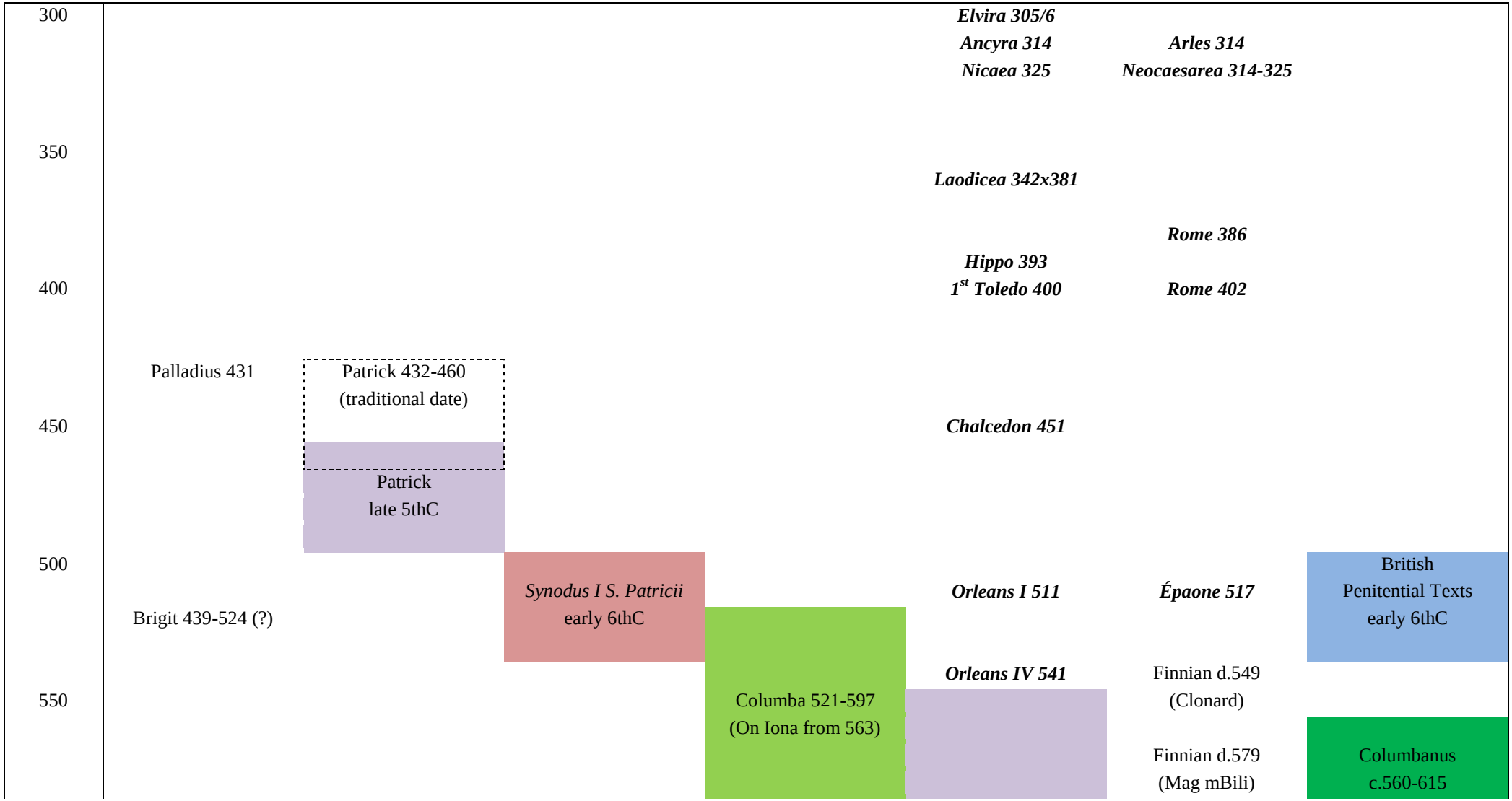
TABLE 2: COMPREHENSIVE PENITENTIALS

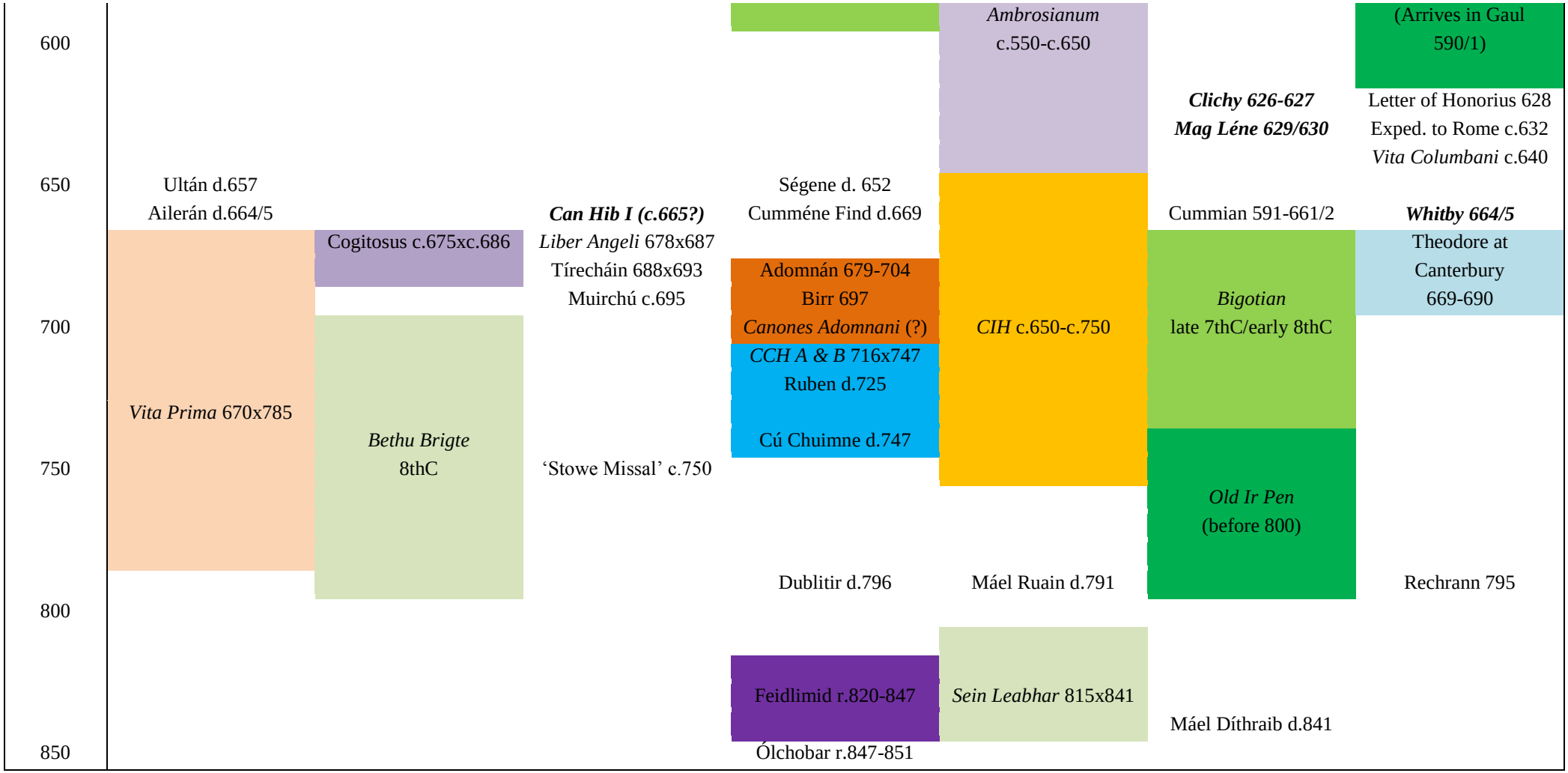
	Paenitentiale Ambrosianum	*Paenitentiale Cummeani*	'Penitential of Theodore'		*Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum*		'Old-Irish Penitential'	
Premeditated	Surrendering of arms, denounced 13 years: bishop 7 years: presbyter 6 years: deacon 4 years: monk	Surrendering of arms and perpetual exile	Laying aside of arms OR 7 years with 3 years without meat & wine (layman)	7/10 years (murderer) Numerous counts – permanent penance at a monastery	If committed after a vow of perfection, perpetual exile	14 years (parricide) Laying aside of arms OR 7 years for killing monk/cleric	7 years for non-kin-slaying homicide, reduced with fines Exile or penance for life for killing one in orders, reduced with fines	21 years – killing daughter/son 14 years – killing a parent 10 years – killing sibling/aunt/uncle/ extended family
Unpremeditated, 'through anger'	3 years	3 years	3 years		3 years		3 years	
Accidental	1 ½ years	1 year	1 year		1 year		1 year	
Revenge			7/10 years OR half term with fine for a relative	3/10 years for a brother	7/10 years OR half term with fine for a relative	3 years for a brother	4 years OR 40 nights	
In conflict, at the command of a lord			40 days exclusion or penance		40 days		40 nights OR 18 months	
Thought-crime	Prayer, bread, & water until hatred overcome	Bread & water until hatred is overcome					Make peace with the source of the anger, or expulsion	

TABLE 3: *CÁIN ADOMNÁIN*

For the killing of...	*...a woman...*			*...a clerical student or innocent youth...*		*...a man or woman...*
...by an individual man	7 *cumal*s & value of 7 years paid by family, dismemberment & death of perpetrator	OR 14 *cumal*s & 14 years	*...by 1-299*	8 *cumal*s & 8 years	*...by a woman*	Setting adrift
...by a multitude	Every 5th man up to 300 suffers the above		*...by 300-1000*	1 *cumal* & 1 year		
...by few	1/3 suffer dismemberment & death 1/3 pay 14 *cumal*s 1/3 suffer alienage		*...in inadvertence or ignorance*	½ fine		
Witnesses	Cursed			Equivalent to perpetrator		

TIMELINE


300
350
400
450
500
550
Elvira 305/6
Ancyra 314
Arles 314
Nicaea 325
Neocaesarea 314-325
Laodicea 342x381
Rome 386
Hippo 393
1st Toledo 400
Rome 402
Palladius 431
Patrick 432-460
(traditional date)
Chalcedon 451
Patrick
late 5thC
Synodus I S. Patricii
early 6thC
Orleans I 511
Épaone 517
British
Penitential Texts
early 6thC
Brigit 439-524 (?)
Orleans IV 541
Finnian d.549
(Clonard)
Columba 521-597
(On Iona from 563)
Finnian d.579
(Mag mBili)
Columbanus
c.560-615


600
650
700
750
800
850
Ultán d.657
Ailerán d.664/5
Vita Prima 670x785
Cogitosus c.675xc.686
Bethu Brigte
8thC
Can Hib I (c.665?)
Liber Angeli 678x687
Tírecháin 688x693
Muirchú c.695
'Stowe Missal' c.750
Ségene d. 652
Cumméne Find d.669
Adomnán 679-704
Birr 697
Canones Adomnani (?)
CCH A & B 716x747
Ruben d.725
Cú Chuimne d.747
Dublitir d.796
Feidlimid r.820-847
Ólchobar r.847-851
Ambrosianum
c.550-c.650
CIH c.650-c.750
Máel Ruain d.791
Sein Leabhar 815x841
Clichy 626-627
Mag Léne 629/630
Cummian 591-661/2
Bigotian
late 7thC/early 8thC
Old Ir Pen
(before 800)
Máel Díthraib d.841
(Arrives in Gaul
590/1)
Letter of Honorius 628
Exped. to Rome c.632
Vita Columbani c.640
Whitby 664/5
Theodore at
Canterbury
669-690
Rechrann 795

Bibliography

a) Primary sources

Adomnán of Iona, *Vita S. Columbae*, Anderson, A. O., and Anderson, M. O. (eds. and trans.), *Adomnán's 'Life of Columba'*, (Edinburgh, 1961; 2nd edn, Oxford, 1991).

_____, *Cáin Adomnáin*, Meyer, K. (ed. and trans.), *Cáin Adomnáin: An Old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adomnan* (Oxford, 1905), pp. 2-33.

_____, *The Law of Innocents*, Ní Dhonnchadha, M., 'The law of Adomnán: a translation', in O'Loughlin, T. (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697: essays in commemoration of the law of innocents* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 53-68.

_____, *Cáin Adomnáin and Canones Adomnani*, Ó Néill, P. P., and Dumville, D. N. (eds. and trans.) (Cambridge, 2003).

The Annals of Clonmacnoise: from the earliest period to A.D. 1408, Mageoghagan, C. (trans.), and Murphy, D. (ed.) (Dublin, 1896)

The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503), Mac Airt, S. (ed.) (Dublin, 1951).

The Annals of St-Bertin, Nelson, J. (trans.) (Manchester, 1991).

The Annals of Tigernach, Stokes, W. (ed. and trans.) (Felinfach, 1993) 2 vols; collected reprint of *Revue Celtique*, 16 (1895), pp. 374-419; 17 (1896), pp. 6-33, pp. 116-236, and pp. 337-420; and 18 (1897), pp. 9-59, and pp. 150-303.

The Annals of Ulster, to A.D. 1131; part 1: text and translation, Mac Airt, S. and Mac Niocaill, G. (eds. and trans.) (Dublin, 1983).

Basil, *Letters*, Way, A. C. (trans.), (Washington DC, 1951), 2 vols.

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Colgrave, B., and Mynors, R. A. B. (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969).

_____, *Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum episcopum*, Grocok, C., and Wood, I. N. (eds. and trans.), *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow: Bede's Homily i. 13 on Benedict Biscop, Bede's History of the Abbots of Wearmought and Jarrow, The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith, Bede's Letter to Ecgbert, Bishop of York* (Oxford, 2013), pp.124-161.

Bethu Brigte, Ó hAodha, D. (ed. and trans.) (Dublin, 1978).

Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963).

_____, *The Works of St. Patrick, St. Secundinus, Hymn on St. Patrick* (New York, 1953).

Byrne, F. J., 'The Lament for Cummíne Foto', *Ériu* 31 (1980), pp. 111-122.

Canones Adomnani, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 176-181.

Canones Hibernenses, Bieler, L. (ed. and trans.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 160-175.

Charles-Edwards, T. M., *The Chronicle of Ireland* (Liverpool, 2006), 2 vols.

Cogitosus, *Vita II Sanctae Brigitae*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Feb. 1, pp. 135-141.

Columbanus, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Walker, G. S. M. (ed. and trans.) (Dublin, 1957).

Connolly, S. (trans.), '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 119 (1989), pp. 5-49.

Connolly, S., and Picard, J.-M. (trans.), 'Cogitosus's "Life of St Brigit" Content and Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 117 (1987), pp. 5-27.

Constantius of Lyon, *Vita S. Germani*, René Borius (ed. and trans.), *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre* (Paris, 1965).

de Clercq, C. (ed. and trans.), *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VI^{e}-VII^{e} siècles)* (Paris, 1989), 2 vols.

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Cameron, A., and Hall, S. G. (trans.) (Oxford, 1999).

Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Lawlor, H. J. (ed.), and Oulton, J. E. L. (trans.) (London, 1932), 2 vols.

Excerpta Quedam de Libro Dauidis, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 70-73.

Finsterwalder, P. W., *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929).

Gildas, *Liber querulous de excidio Britanniae*, Winterbottom, M. (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and other works* (London, 1978).

Gwynn, E. J., *The Rule of Tallaght*, *Hermathena*, XLIV, 2nd supplemental volume (1927).

_____, 'An Irish Penitential', *Éiru*, 7 (1914), pp. 121-195.

Hefele, C. J., *A History of the Christian Councils: from the original documents*, Clark, W. R. (ed. and trans.) (Edinburgh, 1871-1896), 5 vols.

Hood, A. B. E. (ed. and trans.), *St. Patrick: his writings and Muichu's Life* (London, 1978).

Howlett, D., *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Dublin, 1994).

Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita S. Columbani*, in Krusch, B. (ed.), *Ionae vitae sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* (Hannover, 1905), pp. 148-224.

Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, Creed, J. L. (ed. and trans.) (Oxford, 1984).

Lapidge, M., and Herren, M. (eds. and trans.), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979).

Liber Angeli, in Bieler, L. (ed. & trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 184-191.

Mansi, J. P., (ed.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1759-78), 53 vols.

McNeill, J. T., and Gamer, H. M. (eds. and trans.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a translation of the principal "libri poenitentiales" and selections from related documents* (New York, 1938; reprinted, 1990).

Miller, A. W. K., 'O'Clery's Irish Glossary', *Revue Celtique* IV (1879-1880), pp. 349-428 and V (1881-1883), pp. 1-69.

The Monastery of Tallaght, Gwynn, E. J., and Purton, W. J. (eds. and trans.), 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 29 (1911/1912), pp. 127-164.

Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, in Bieler L. (ed. and trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 61-123.

Nennius, *Leabhar Breathnach annso sis: The Irish Version of the* Historia Britonum *of Nennius*, Todd, J. H., and Herbert, A. (eds.) (Dublin, 1848).

Ní Dhonnchadha, M. (trans.), 'The law of Adomnán: a translation', in O'Loughlin, Thomas (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697: essays in commemoration of the law of innocents* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 53-68.

'The Old-Irish Penitential', Binchy, D. A. (ed.), in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 258-276.

'The Old-Irish Table of Commutations', D. A. Binchy (ed.), in L. Bieler (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 277-283.

Patrick, *Confessio*, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum Santi Patricii Episcopi* (Dublin, 1993; reprinted as one volume from *Classica et Mediaevalia* 11 (1950) and 12 (1951)), pp. 56-90.

_____, *Epistola ad milites Corotici*, in Bieler, L., (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum Santi Patricii Episcopi* (Dublin, 1993; reprinted as one volume from *Classica et Mediaevalia* 11 (1950) and 12 (1951)), pp. 91-102.

Paenitentiale Ambrosianum, in Körntgen, L. (ed.), *Studien zu den Quellen de frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 258-270.

Paenitentiale Cummeani, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 108-135.

Paenitentiale S. Columbani, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 96-107.

Paenitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 198-239.

Penitentialis Vinniani, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 74-95.

Praefatio Gildae de Poenitentia, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963; reprinted, 1975), pp. 60-65.

Prosper of Aquitaine, *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio contra Collatorem*, Migne, J. P. (ed.), *Patrologia latina* (Paris, 1844-64), 221 vols; vol. 51, col. 213-276.

_____, *Epitoma Chronicon*, Mommsen, T. (ed.), *Chronica minora saec. IV, V, VI, VII*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: auctores antiquissimi* (Berlin, 1892), vol. ix, pp. 385-485.

The Rule of the Céli Dé, Gwynn, E. J. (ed. and trans.), 'The Rule of the *Céli Dé*', *The Rule of Tallaght*, *Hermathena*, XLIV, 2nd supplemental volume (1927), pp. 64-87.

Sharpe, R. (trans.), *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St. Columba* (London, 1995).

Sinodus Aquilonalis Britaniae, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 66-67.

Sinodus Luci Victorie, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 68-69.

The Stowe Missal; Ms. D. II. 3 in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, Warner, G. F. (ed.) (London, 1915), 2 vols.

Sulpicius Severus, 'Life of Martin of Tours', White, C. (ed. & trans), *Early Christian Lives* (London, 1998), pp. 134-159.

Synodus I S. Patricii, in Bieler, L. (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 54-59.

The Teaching of Máel Ruain, Gwynn, E. J. (ed. and trans.), 'The Teaching of Máel Ruain', *The Rule of Tallaght*, *Hermathena*, XLIV, 2nd supplemental volume (1927), pp. 1-63.

Tírechán, *Collectanea*, in Bieler, L. (ed. & trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 122-167.

'The Tract on the Mass in the Stowe Missal' in Stokes, W., and Strachen, J. (eds.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse* (Dublin, 1975), 2 vols.

Vita S. Albei, in Heist, W. W. (ed.) *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels, 1965), pp. 118-131.

Vita I Sanctae Brigitae, *Acta Sanctorum*, Feb. 1, pp. 118-135.

Vita S. Cainnechi, in Heist, W. W. (ed.) *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels, 1965), pp. 182 -198.

Vita S. Cuthberti auctore anonymo, Colgrave, B. (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by and Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 59-139

Vita prior S. Lugidi, in Heist, W. W. (ed.) *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels, 1965), pp. 131-145.

Walsh, M., and Ó Cróinín, D. (eds. and trans.), *Cummian's Letter* De controversia Paschali *and the* De ratione conputandi (Toronto, 1988).

Wasserschleben, H., *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd ed. (Liepzieg, 1885).

Whitelock, D., Brett, M., and Brooke, C. N. L. (eds.), *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church I: A.D. 871-1204* (Oxford, 1981), 2 vols.

b) Secondary sources

Anderson, M. O., *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973).

Bachrach, D. S., *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300-1215* (Woodbridge, 2003).

Bethell, D. L. T., 'The Originality of the Early Irish Church', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 111 (1981), pp. 36-49.

Bhreathnach, E., 'Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*: Perspectives of Ireland, 700-850', in Brown, M. P., and Farr, C. A. (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (Leicester, 2001), pp. 113-125.

Bieler, L., '*Interpretationes Patricianae*', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 107 (1967), pp. 1 -13.

_____, (ed.), *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963).

_____, 'The mission of Palladius: a comparative study of sources', *Traditio*, 6 (1948), pp. 1-33.

Binchy, D. A., 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', *Studia Hibernica*, 8 (1968), pp. 49-59.

_____, 'Patrick and His Biographers: Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), pp. 7-173.

Bray, D., 'Ireland's other apostle: Cogitosus' St Brigit', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic* Studies, 59 (2010), pp. 55-70.

Breathnach, L., 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', in McCone, K., *et al*, *Stair na Gaeilge* (Maynooth, 1994), pp. 221-334.

_____, 'Canon law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 439-459

Bullough, D., 'The Career of Columbanus', in Lapidge, M. (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 1-28.

Byrne, F. J., 'The Viking age', in in Ó Cróinín, D. (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: 1 Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 609-634.

_____, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973).

Charles-Edwards, T. M., 'The structure and purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', in Wooding, J. M., *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 205-218.

_____, *The Chronicle of Ireland* (Liverpool, 2006), 2 vols.

_____, 'Early Irish law', in Ó Cróinín, D., (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: vol.1 Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 331-370.

_____, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000; reprinted, 2004).

_____, 'Early Irish Saints' Cults and their Constituencies,' *Ériu*, 54 (Dublin, 2004), pp. 79-102.

_____, 'Ulster, saints of (*act. c.*400 – *c.*600)', *OxDNB* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 55, pp. 872 -878

_____, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer*, Quiggin Pamphlet on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 4 (Cambridge, 1999).

_____, 'The construction of the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), pp. 209-237.

_____, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', in Lapidge, M. (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 217-239.

_____, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', in Lapidge, M. (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: commemorative studies on his life and influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 141-174.

_____, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: mission and primatial authority', i Dumville, D. N. (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 1-12.

Clancy, T. O., 'Adomnán and the abbacy of Clonmacnois: historical needs, literary narratives', *The Innes Review*, 57:2 (2006), pp. 206-215.

_____, 'Columba, Adomnán and the cult of saints in Scotland', *The Innes Review*, 48.1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 3-34.

Clancy, T. O., and Gilbert, M., *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995; reprinted, 2003).

Connolly, H., *The Irish Penitentials and Their Significance for the Sacrament of Penance Today* (Dublin, 1995).

Davies, L. M., '*Statuta Ecclesia Antiqua* and the Gallic Councils in the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 14 (2000), pp. 85-110.

De Paor, L., *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Dublin, 1993).

Doherty, C., 'Leinster, saints of', *OxDNB* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 33, pp. 277-279.

Dumville, D. N., 'St Finnian of Movilla: Briton, Gael, or Ghost?', in Proudfoot, L. (ed.), *Down: History & Society* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 71-84.

_____, 'Ireland, Brittany, and England: transmission and use of the *Collectio canonum hibernensis*', in Laurent, C., and Helen, D. (eds.), *Irland et Bretagne: vingt siecles d'histoire: actes du colloque de Rennes* (Rennes, 1994), pp. 84-95.

_____, 'The Date 432', in Dumville, D. N. (ed.), *et al*, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 39-43.

_____, 'St Patrick at his 'First Synod'?', in Dumville, D. N. (ed.), *et al*, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 175-178.

_____, 'Gildas and Uinniau', in Lapidge, M., and Dumville, D. N. (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbrigde, 1984), pp. 207-214.

_____, '*Echtrae* and *Immram*: some problems of definition', *Ériu*, 27 (1976), pp. 73-94.

Enright, M. J., *Prophecy and Kingship in Adomnán's 'Life of Saint Columba'* (Dublin, 2013).

Etchingham, C., *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Naas, 1999).

_____, 'The implications of *paruchia*', in *Ériu*, 44 (1993), pp. 139-162.

_____, 'The Early Irish Church: Some Observance on Pastoral Care and Dues', *Éiru*, 42 (1991), pp. 99-118.

Flechner, R., 'Patrick's reasons for leaving Britain', in Edmunds, F., and Russell, P. (eds.), *Tome: studies in medieval Celtic history and law in honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 125-133.

_____, 'An Insular Tradition of Ecclesiastical Law: Fifth to Eighth Century', in Graham-Campbell, J., and Ryan, M. (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations Before the Vikings* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 23-46.

_____, 'The making of the Canons of Theodore', *Peritia*, 17-18 (2003-2004), pp. 121-143.

Follett, W., *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006).

Frantzen, A. J., *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Jersey, 1983).

Fraser, J. E., 'Adomnán and the morality of war' in Wooding, J. M., *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 95-111.

Haggart, C., 'The *céli Dé* and the early medieval Irish church: a reassessment', *Studia Hibernica*, 34 (2006-2007), pp. 17-62.

Haley, G. C., 'Tamlachta: The Map of Plague Burials and Some Implications for Early Irish History', in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 22 (2002), p. 96-140.

Hamlin, A., 'The early church in County Down to the twelfth century', in Proudfoot, L. (ed.), *Down: History and Society* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 47-70.

Herbert, M., *Iona, Kells, and Derry: the history and hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988).

Howlett, D., 'Vita I Sanctae Brigitae', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), pp. 1-23.

Hughes, K., 'Evidence for contacts between the churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age', in Clemoes, P., and Hughes, K. (eds.), *England Before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 49-67.

_____, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966).

_____, 'The Celtic Church and the Papacy', in Lawrence, C. H. (ed.), *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1965), pp. 3-28.

Jaski, B., 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*', *Peritia*, 14 (2000), pp. 51-69.

Kelly, F., *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988, reprinted 2005).

Kenney, J. F., *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (New York, 1929; reprinted with revision by Bieler, L., 1966)

Kirby, D. P., *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991).

Lambkin, B., 'Blathmac and the *Céili Dé*: a reappraisal", in *Celtica*, 23 (1999), pp. 132-154.

Lapidge, M., 'The career of Archbishop Theodore', in Lapidge, M. (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: commemorative studies on his life and influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1 -29.

Lapidge, M., and Sharpe, R., *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400-1200* (Dublin, 1985).

Mac Donald, A., 'Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and the early churches of Tiree' in Wooding, Jonathan M., *et al* (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: theologian, lawmaker, peacemaker* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 219-236.

Matthew, H. G. C., and Harrison, B. H. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 61 vols.

McCarthy, D., 'The chronology of Saint Brigit of Kildare', *Peritia* 14 (2000), pp. 255-281.

McCone, K., 'The Celtic and Indo-European origins of the *fían*', in Arbuthnt, S. J., and Parsons, G. (eds.), *The Gaelic Finn Tradition* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 14-30.

_____, 'An tSean-Ghaeilge agus a Réamhstair', in McCone, K., *et al*, *Stair na Gaeilge* (Maynooth, 1994), pp .61-220.

_____, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 1-22.

_____, 'An Introduction into Early Irish Saints' Lives', *The Maynooth Review/Revieú \Mhá Nuad*, 11 (Dec., 1984), pp. 26-59.

_____, ‘Brigit in the Seventh Century: a saint with three Lives?’, *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 107-145.

McNeill, J. T., *The Celtic Penitentials and Their Influence on Continental Christianity* (Paris, 1923).

_____, ‘Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials’, in *Church History*, Vol.1, No.1 (Mar., 1932), pp. 14-26.

Meckler, M., ‘Carnal love and priestly ordination on sixth-century Tiree’, *The Innes Review*, 51.2 (2000), pp. 95-108.

Meens, R., *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014).

_____, ‘The historiography of early medieval penance’, in Firey, A. (ed.), *A New History of Penance* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 73-95.

_____, ‘Remedies for sin’, in Noble, T. F. X., Smith, J. M., and Baranowski, R. A. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: vol. 3, Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600-c. 1100* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 399-415.

_____, ‘Columbanus (d. 615), *OxDNB* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 12, pp. 809-813.

_____, ‘The uses of the Old Testement in early medieval canon law: the *Collectio Vetus Gallica* and the *Collectio Hibernensis*’, in Hen, Y., and Innes, M. (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 67-77.

Nelson, J. L., *Charles the Bald* (Harlow, 1992).

Ní Dhonnchadha, M., ‘Birr and the law of the innocents’ in O’Loughlin, T. (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697: essays in commemoration of the law of innocents* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 13-32.

_____, ‘The Guarantor list of the *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697’, *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 178-215.

Oakley, T. P., ‘The Penitentials as Sources for Mediaeval History’, in *Speculum*, 15, No. 2 (Apr., 1940), pp. 210-223.

_____, ‘Some Neglected Aspects in the History of Penance’, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 24, No. 3 (Oct., 1938), pp. 293-309.

_____, ‘Cultural Affiliations of Ireland in the Early Penitentials’, *Speculum*, 8, No. 4 (Oct., 1933), pp. 489-500.

_____, “The Origins of Irish Penitential Discipline”, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1933), pp. 320-332.

_____, ‘Commutations and Redemptions of Penance in the Penitentials’, in *The Catholic Historical Review*, 18, No.3 (Oct., 1932), pp. 341-351.

Ó Cróinín, D., ‘Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169’, in Ó Cróinín, D. (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: vol. I, Prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 371-404.

_____, ‘Ireland, 400-800’, in Ó Cróinín, D. (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: 1 Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 182-234.

_____, 'Who was Palladius 'first bishop of the Irish'?', *Peritia*, 12 (2000), pp. 205-237.

_____, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London, 1995).

_____, 'Cummianus Longus and the iconography of Christ and the Apostles in early Irish literature', in Ó Corráin, D., Breatnach, L., and McCone, K. (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), pp. 268-279.

_____, 'Mo Sinu maccu Min and the computus at Bangor', in *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 281-295.

O'Dwyer, P., 'The *Céli Dé* Reform', in Ní Chatháin, P., and Richter, M. (eds.), *Irland und Europa; Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 83-88.

_____, *Célí Dé: spiritual reform in Ireland, 750-900* (Dublin, 1981).

O'Loughlin, T., *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London, 2007).

_____, 'Adomnán: a man of many parts' in O'Loughlin, T. (ed.), *Adomnán at Birr, AD697: essays in commemoration of the law of innocents* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 41-52.

_____, *Celtic Theology; Humanity, World, and God in Early Irish Writings* (London, 2000).

_____, 'Penitentials and pastoral care', in Evans, G. R. (ed.), *A History of Pastoral Care* (London, 2000), pp. 93-111.

Ó Néill, P. P., 'Irish Observance of the Three Lents and the Date of the St Gall Priscian (MS 904), *Ériu*, 51 (2000), p. 159-180.

Ó Riain, P., 'Finnian or Winniau?', in Ní Chatháin, P., and Richter, M. (eds.), *Irland und Europa/Ireland and Europe: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter/The Early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 52-57.

Picard, J.-M., 'The purpose of Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 160-77.

Richter, M., *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999).

_____, 'The English link in Hiberno-Frankish relations in the seventh century', in Picard, J.-M. (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France, AD 600-850* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 95 -118.

Ritari, K., *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral theology in the Lives of Columba and Saint Brigit*, (Turnhout, 2009).

Sharpe, R., *Medieval Irish Saints' Live: An Introduction to the Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991).

_____, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*: the oldest texts', *Peritia*, 1, (1982), pp. 81-106.

_____, 'Some problems concerning the organization of the Church in early medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 230-270.

_____, ‘Kings who Opted Out’, in Wormwald p. (ed.), *Ideal and Reailty in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 154-176.

_____, ‘Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil’s Men’, *Ériu*, 30 (1979), pp. 75-92.

Symth, A. P., ‘Bishop Patrick and the earliest Christian mission to Ireland’, in Bradshaw, B., and Keogh, D. (eds.), *Christianity in Ireland: revisiting the story* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 11-20.

Stancliffe, C., ‘Patrick [St Patrick, Pádraig] (*fl*. 5th cent.)’, in *OxDNB* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 43, pp. 69-80.

_____, ‘The miracle stories in seventh-century Irish saints' lives’, in Fontaine, J., and Hillgarth, J.N., (eds.), *The seventh century change and continuity : proceedings of a joint French and British colloquium held at the Warburg Institute 89 July 1988* (London, 1992), pp. 87-115.

_____, ‘Red, white and blue martyrdom’, in Whitelock, D., McKitterick, R., and Dumville, D. N. (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21-46.

Stevenson, J., ‘The Beginnings of Literacy in Ireland’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 89 C (1989), pp. 127-165.

Swift, C., ‘Brigit, Patrick, and the Kings of Kildare A.D. 640-850’, in Nolan, W., and McGrath, T. (eds.), *Kildare: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 96-128.

_____, ‘Patrick’s conversion of Ireland to Christianity and the establishment of Armagh’, in Barlett, J. R., and Kinsella, S. D. (eds.), *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Ireland: lectures delivered in Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, 2001-2002*, pp. 25-35

_____, ‘Tírechán’s Motives in Compiling the “Collectanea”: An Alternative Interpretation’, *Éiru*, 45 (1994), pp. 53-82.

Thomas, C., ‘Palladius and Patrick’, in MacShamhráin A. (ed.), *The Island of St Patrick: Church and Ruling Dynasties in Fingal and Meath, 400-1148* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 13-37.

Watkins, O. D., *A History of Penance: Vol. II: The Western Church from AD 450 to AD 1215* (London, 1920).